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THE BLACK CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS WITH BLACK MARRIAGES

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BY

Melvin O. Marriner

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MENTORS

Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr.
and
Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu

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ABSTRACT

THE BLACK CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE

CRISIS WITH BLACK MARRIAGES

by

Melvin O. Marriner

United Theological Seminary, 1993

Mentors: Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu and Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr.

This project was specifically designed to address the complex dynamics in African American marriages by the African American Christian Church. Ten sessions of structured Africentric experiences, coupled with a proper biblical exegesis of marriage were designed and implemented with married couples.

The development of this project was designed to offer preventive maintenance and maintenance for fragmented marriages that are struggling not to become a statistic of divorce. The African American Church is also re-establishing itself as the extended support mechanism for the family. Results of the model were evaluated by qualitative analysis instruments.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that our society and many of our institutions are eroding at an alarming pace. As we are making great strides in technology, we are also slipping in our ability to maintain wholistic relationships. To be quite frank, many have no conception of what a wholistic relationship or marriage is, much less what one looks like. At times, it seems easier to understand the planning and launching of a space shuttle into orbit than to explain how to have a wholistic marriage. Current statistics show that one of every two marriages in the United States end in divorce. "One out of every two." This is a serious crisis facing the stability of the family and the church. For if there is a weak family structure, then it is evitable that it is going to bring about a weak local church with limited ministries and vice versa.

The instability of African American marriages have been greatly caused by racism and yet a greater evil, the mandatory rejection of self as a viable means of worth by the Europeans and the European American system. To offer a critical, but yet honest extension of the fragmentation existing among African American marriages, we must not stop at racism, for racism was simply a strong instigator. Indeed, we were and are a product of a systematic plan to destroy the African American family and in particularly, the African American's image of strength. The question has been

asked, "did slavery totally destroy the African American family structure"? The key words here are "totally destroy". African American relationships have limped on to survive many hurts and handicaps and we are not nor ever will be "totally destroyed". We are a people of survival. If God's grace was sufficient in allowing us to survive the "middle passage", then certainly his grace continues to be sufficient to help us deal with the horrors facing relationships. The sense of suffering and pain has been the network of events which the African American family and church have struggled to overcome the damages of slavery and continued sexism, classicism and racism. I contend that there are many causes for the current crisis confronting the institution of marriage and that through our Lord, Jesus Christ who has redeemed broken relationships and through his sacrifice, we can achieve wholesomeness and happiness through the guidance of his church.

This focus emerges from a world-wide, but yet personal crisis that's challenging the fertility of African American relationships and the beckoning "scream" for the church to reciprocate with words of reconciliation and redemption. The church, as it should, is being called upon to bring its faith to bear upon this crisis and to respond in helping establish productive and viable relationships. Lest anyone be misled or naive, broken or troubled relationships are not

simply a rising trend among African Americans only, but with other ethnic groups as well. If one were to honestly investigate their historical culture and honestly report it, one would inevitably conclude that trouble and broken relationships are ethnically color blind. But, since I am closely integrated with the African American culture and not merely because of my dark skinned complexion, but my ideology and committed service to this ethnic group; my concentration is geared toward an Africentric perspective for healing fragmented relationships.

At a time in history when we are hopefully about to enter a new millennium, the African American Church stands at the crossroads of decision. The decision is whether to remain a sleeping giant in dealing with the hurts and brokenness of a people or to awaken to the fullest potential as the "Church of the Living God" and attempt to respond in an wholistic manner. By no means am I insinuating that the African American Church has not been instrumental in the life of its parishioners, but from personal experiences it has not honestly dealt with the crisis confronting our families and relationships. I do feel that the African American Church is now willing to prepare itself to meet these challenges of the 90's and even beyond into the new millennium. The church must utilize all essential spiritual and secular resources, and practically apply works to its

faith. Therefore, in my context for ministry, I seek to mobilize Grove Church in formulating a Marriage Development Center, for the purpose of:

1. Becoming acquainted with the complex dynamics of marriage;

2. Training the church in applying new insights to the realities confronting African American marriages and relationships;

3. Pinpointing those attitudes, behavior skills and processes which nurture health and wholeness among the married, rather than sickness and fragmentation;

4. Considering family and relationships in light of the Judeo-Christian faith as it relates and is expressed through the African and African American experiences;

5. Teaching and emphasizing African American history;

6. Redefining family from an Africentric perspective;

7. And being a maintenance station and a preventive agency before marriages reach that divorce stage. "By wisdom a house is built and by understanding it is established: and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Proverbs 24:3,4).

As an African American pastor, I have found that regardless of how one views the church, at the instance of an unbearable crisis, many have come back to the church for direction and support. The fact of the matter is, the church of Jesus Christ has been the "centeredness" out of which we have operated in the past. What has apparently happened is that African Americans have tried to operate outside of its African spiritual centeredness and have

become unbalanced in their relationships. Dr. John Kinney, Dean of Virginia Union University's School of Theology suggests that many marital problems exist because of a deviation to the Genesis 2:24 reference to "oneness". Dr. Kinney further suggests that African Americans have primarily been shaped by a European interpretation of "oneness". Further discussion will be given to this area in a later chapter.

The African American family shares with the African American Church the concept of inclusive community. In reading The Church in the Life of the Black Family by Wallace Charles Smith, he renders four critical assumptions in helping to initiate the healing process in the African American family:

> "1. That the black family has shown marvelous survival and adaptive skills through extraordinary hardship;
>
> 2. That African retention and particularly the concept of extended family greatly aided in overcoming slavery's horrors;
>
> 3. That white ideals of nuclear family structure and role need not necessarily be adhered to for a family to experience wholeness;
>
> 4. That black women through the endurance of the double jeopardy of blackness and femaleness have been forced to develop a unique identity which has been largely misunderstood by white male theologians, feminists, and, sadly, many black male theologians as well."[1]

> "When the black family has managed to survive in spite of societal exigencies, it has done so largely through the way in which it has drawn on the church for inspiration and for resources. The black church emerged as such a force in the life of blacks because it filled a real need. For the families that were being torn asunder by slavery, the black church became the place of nurturing and socialization. 'Brother' or 'sister' was not some abstract fundamentalism. It was a concrete way of expressing through the church the familial interrelatedness which, through the slave system, was often denied nuclear family members."[2]

As African American marriages limp to the church, they must find a sensitive place for healing, love, support and an inspirational word from God, as well as, a wholistic ministry being performed by the Church of the Living God. And, as they come, may they come with a sense of seriousness for wholeness that the Christian faith demands.

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

I. HISTORICAL SKETCH

The beginning of the Baptist religious organization in Churchland, Virginia, then known as Craney Island was on November 4, 1825, by Reverend M. Woodson, a white minister. The first public service was held in the Craney Island School Building located on the past Churchland Academy site, off Churchland Boulevard. In the summer of 1829, because of the expansion in membership, a new church edifice was erected, known as Sycamore Hill Baptist Church, now called Churchland Baptist Church.

The Historical Review of Churchland Baptist Church (1963) shows that the church membership increased very rapidly. After some serious consideration, a decision was reached by the Mother Church (Sycamore Hill Baptist Church) to preserve the strong status of its Negro members, several hundred, who had proven their Christian worth, been faithful to their God, their fellowmen, and their Christian masters. In 1840, after much debate by white leaders of Sycamore Hill Baptist Church, the Negro members were granted the privilege to have a separate place of worship with strict guidelines. Mrs. Elizabeth Wright, a member of Sycamore Hill, donated the building site which was officially designated for the

Negro congregation around Thanksgiving Day in November by Reverend Dunn. The Grove Baptist Church was organized and built in 1840, at 5910 West Norfolk Road, making it the oldest African American Baptist Church in the city of Portsmouth, Virginia. It is still located at the same site.

From 1840 to 1866, the Negro members met regularly in their new house of worship, but were still considered members of Sycamore Hill Baptist Church. Three white members had to be present whenever the Negro congregation would meet, because of the laws at that present time. In keeping with those laws and for the protection of the Negro members, the white members of Sycamore Hill Baptist Church appointed a committee each year to attend all meetings and worship services held by its Negro congregation. All action and disciplinary measures taken at such meeting were subject to confirmation by the Mother Church. It is most interesting to note that in a number of instances, a white member was designated by the Mother Church to attempt to reconcile difficulties between two Negro members, and undertook the task apparently with as much, or more, patience and tact than he would have had the disagreement been between two of his white brethren. At this time in history, black males could take no position of authority or respect that perhaps would threaten white establishment. Therefore, the pastor of the Mother Church, at the close of

its services, would preach to the black congregation at Grove Baptist Church, basically from a Western perspective. The congregation at Grove was very grateful to have their separate place of worship, but limited in their freedom of expression. They would usually slip away in the evening in the midst of groves of trees and bushes to express themselves verbally and physically. By the way, Grove Baptist Church was named "Grove" because it was built in the middle of groves of trees.

Before the Civil War, blacks in the Churchland area were forced to attend church every Sunday, unless excused by the committee to Sycamore Baptist Church. It was believed to make them obedient and less violate. It was not until the year after the Civil War that blacks were allowed to choose six deacons and eventually in January 1870, after the Emancipation Proclamation called its first black pastor. The first pastor was Reverend Thomas Washington, a native of Matthews County, Virginia, with an annual salary of $200.00.

In records of Grove Baptist Church's business meetings as early as the 1860's, minutes written by William Pitt, indicate that the Negro church continued to be a cohesive and protective organization which served to keep alive the interest and loyalty of its membership which had dropped from nearly 1,000 in 1840 to about 150 in 1866. The reason

for this was due to the fact that forced attendance was no longer required. Parenthetically, times haven't changed a great deal when it comes to a person's attitude about the importance of church, regardless of the season or situation. Even in 1992, when there has been a long recession, people are coming back to their foundation, but after the "Civil War" of unemployment, underemployment, and other crisis have passed, it is my prayer that they would not repeat the same destructive past as before.

Several other interesting facts were found in these minutes such as the resolutions that were adopted and enforced by the congregation. Some of these were (1) that any member who failed to attend church at least once a month or who was absent from more than three consecutive monthly conferences would be disciplined, (2) that any member who committed adultery, made an open confession to the world, or attended or hosted a party would be dismissed (November 1867), (3) that the males pay ten cents (.10) and the females pay five cents (.05) a month for the Missionary causes (May 6, 1869). In conclusion to this historical sketch, here is the list of Grove Baptist Church's pastors.

Pastor # 1 - Rev. Thomas (January 1870-June 1873)*
" # 2 - Rev. Lewis Tucker (Jan. 1874-Aug. 1875)*
" # 3 - Rev. John Godwin (April 1877-April 1881)*

" # 4 - Rev. H. Powell (June 1881-April 1887)*

" # 5 - Rev. Harry Barco (March 1887-Dec. 1916)*

" # 6 - Dr. A. D. Moore (July 1918-1922)*

" # 7 - Rev. B. B. Williams (Jan. 1924-Dec. 1924)*

" # 8 - Dr. D. B. Mdodona (May 1925-June 1927)*

" # 9 - Rev. Douglas (Nov. 1929-1947)*

" #10 - Dr. G. G. Campbell (1948-1964)

" #11 - Dr. Ralph Reavis (July 1966-June 1974)

" #12 - Dr. Freeman Rhoades (1955-July 1987)

" #13 - Rev. M. O. Marriner (Sept. 1989-present)

Note: * means deceased.

II. CONGREGATIONAL ANALYSIS

Grove Baptist is located at 5910 West Norfolk Road, in the Churchland section of Portsmouth, Virginia. It is the oldest African American Baptist Church in the city of Portsmouth, (154 years old). There are 161 churches in the Portsmouth area and approximately seventeen churches in Grove's zip code (23703) area. The March 7, 1990 Mayor's Census Track, places these seventeen churches into ten categories. Within the 23703, there are six Baptist Churches (two of the African American persuasion), one Apostolic Church (African American persuasion) one United Methodist Church, one - Catholic Church, two - Jewish Congregations, one - Episcopal Church, and one - Church of God in Christ (African American persuasion).

The church has embraced the traditional Baptist procedures, as well as, a traditional African American approach to worship. Our music encompasses the traditional anthems, hymns, spirituals and gospels. The following is our statement of purpose or mission:

> The purpose of this congregation is to serve God, to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and to give visible form to that faith and fellowship to which God has called his people. It is our desire to administer the ordinances and biblical disciplines, seeking to win the lost to Christ, growing spiritually, preaching and teaching the gospel, carrying on missionary ministries, defending the faith and the church, and revealing our love for Jesus Christ by godliness and good works.

The congregation here at Grove, focuses to center its faith wholly in Jesus Christ for their living and salvation and believing the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Grove has adopted a Covenant as an expression of Christ in their daily lives. The government of Grove Baptist is vested in the membership of common believers in Christ Jesus, and is not subject to any ecclesiastical organization.

Being in the fastest growing area of Portsmouth, Grove has had to expand its ministries and seating capacity, to accommodate the growing needs within our church and community. Grove Church has responded to the tears, injustices and fears that are seen and echoes from the lips

of the middle and lower classes in our communities. Being the largest and the oldest African American Baptist Church in this geographical area, Grove has become the base of communal activities for self-help, nourishment of racial pride, and of intellect and mutual insurance against calamity. Grove has 602 active financial members. The congregation consists of a large array of spiritual, financial, and social-economic people. Before the late 1980's, Grove was primarily a family and community oriented church. People were kin through one form of relationship or another. But in the last 1980's and the early 1990's, Grove has changed dramatically from a conservative family oriented church to a church that is now filled with 40% of new members. One of the greatest things I've witness with this congregation, is their genuine love and care for their pastor, the pastor's family and other members and friends. Their attitudes have attracted many new members to our church. Grove has been blest with a host of young adults and married couples, who's presence and desire is to be active in this local ministry. Teaching and mobilizing individuals for service to God and to humanity has been very refreshing and prosperous. The congregation has a strong desire to be taught and equipped in the servitude of God.

It is refreshing to know that 60.5% of our members are under 55 years of age. It is also comforting to know that

around 30% of our membership is under 28 years of age. As well, the church has instituted an adopt-a-senior program in which we provide supportive pastoral care, transportation to and from doctor appointments and food markets. We also provide for our elderly, minor lawn and house care, and anticipate starting a senior's club that meets during the day for various activities. Not only are we helping and supporting them, but through this association they are sharing their wisdom and knowledge with those who will take time to listen. It is through this kind of stimulation that our church has grown and become more effective and continues to be pregnant with great possibilities.

Our Board of Christian Education has been reorganized and given great support from our official boards and surprisingly by the men in our congregation. African American males have come forth as mentors, tutors and volunteers in two of our local schools. They are answering the call and challenge to attempt through God, education and self-respect to be good fathers, husbands and churchmen. Our Board of Christian Education has kept pace with the growing number of congregates' needs and desires, by providing and maintaining the following ministries and programs:

1. Children's Ministry
2. Youth Ministry

3. Adult Ministry (seniors, women, brotherhood and single's ministry, marriage ministry)
4. Leadership Development Ministry
5. Mission and Stewardship Ministry
6. Political and Social Concern Ministry
7. Church School Ministry
8. Health/Recreation Ministry
9. Audio/Visual Ministry
10. Church Publication Ministry
11. Drama Ministry
12. Prayer and Praise Ministry
13. Food & Cloth Ministry
14. Tutorial Program
15. Preventive Substance Abuse Program

Grove Baptist, historically has been a church where great trust and confidence has been bestowed upon the pastor and its spiritual leaders. I can honestly say that the church as a whole has been willing to be led into new and uncharted paths. Our church school has grown in an enormous way, as well as our mid-week prayer and bible study, which averages around 53 people weekly. Our budget for 1991 was $115,000.00. The budget for 1992 is 167,000.00. Most of our newer members have been obedient and have become tithers, while some older members continue to give dues of $1.00 - $3.00 weekly. There remains much more teaching in stewardship and accountability.

The worship experience here at Grove has expanded and become richer as emphasis are placed on genuine praise and worship of our God. Our choirs have grown, not only in numbers, but in spirit and in purpose. Grove is the one and only African American Church that make up the Churchland

Interfaith Counsel. A counsel that was created in the late 1960's and early 1970's to create racial acceptance and appreciation throughout this fast growing area.

III. GEOGRAPHICS

Grove is located in the Churchland section of Portsmouth, Virginia. Other nearby South Hampton Roads cities are: Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. Portsmouth, a historic seaport, now home to the largest U.S. Naval Shipyard, the second largest U.S. Naval Hospital, the Fifth Coast Guard District headquarters. In 1620, John Wood, a shipbuilder, received a grant for a waterfront site on the Elizabeth River from King James I. He built the New World's first shipyard on that site. Known by the British as Gosport, it is today the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, the largest of its kind in the world. The surrounding city, Portsmouth, was laid out as a 60-acre community by Colonel William Crawford in 1752. The world's first ironclad ship, CSS Virginia, was built here by the Confederacy from the hull of the Union Frigate Merrimac.

Grove Church is in the midst of a city called "Virginia's next boom town," an appropriate description, considering its recent monumental growth. Through a unique joint venture by city leaders and citizens, the value of an overall building permit jumped 97% in a single year-the

ninth-largest percentage increase in the nation. Portsmouth continues to take full advantage of its waterside and industrial environments. Its Marine Terminals gained 22% in general cargo tonnage, while the historic Norfolk Naval Shipyard produced $350 million in annual contracts.

Portsmouth's total area, which is defined by city boundaries, not land area is 45.5 square miles. Grove Church is specifically located on one of the finest and richest areas in the city of Portsmouth. Prior to January 1968, Churchland was not a part of Portsmouth, but considered part of Chesapeake, Virginia called "Norfolk County." This area was so promising that in November of 1987, the city of Chesapeake petitioned the U.S. Justice Department to consider overturning the city's 1968 annexation of Churchland which they say was never approved as required under the Voting Rights Act. In 1966, the state Supreme Court approved the annexation of about half the land of Churchland to Portsmouth and the rest remained in Chesapeake as Western Branch. On November 21, 1987, the U.S. Justice Department officially declared Portsmouth home to Churchland's more than 20,000 residents and its many prosperous businesses. (Article from the Virginian Pilot-Ledger Star, November 20 & 21, 1987).

Churchland is bounded on the north by Hampton Roads, on the east by the Western Branch of the Elizabeth River, and on the south and west by a court decreed land. Churchland's main function is that of a high quality residential community located on the outskirts of the core of the metropolitan complex. What this means to the church and is evident by our congregation is that those who attend Grove Church are pretty well stable and family-oriented. Except for the Craney Island Naval Fuel Depot, naval architects, Virginia Chemical, agricultural employment and public schools, there are few jobs or careers in the immediate Churchland area; a high percentage of the labor force is employed outside the area. All other activities within the Churchland annexed area, such as shopping facilities, churches, public schools and libraries are geared largely to serving the needs of the resident population.

IV. DEMOGRAPHICS - PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA

Portsmouth is a city of historical churches, exceptional schools (a new Churchland High School that cost $22 million), hospitals and museums. Its employment rate is excellent with working women present in over half the households and 32% of all household heads employed in white-collar positions. Forty-two percent have attended college and more than six out of ten are married and own a home. Considering the flurry of new homes and business

constructions, these statistics are moving upward in rapid succession. But yet, Portsmouth has the highest unemployment record in the area. In 1980, Portsmouth had a population count of 104,577, but in 1990 it decreased to 103,907, a -0.6% change. The only other city with a decline in population was our neighboring city, Norfolk with -2.2%. The median age in Portsmouth is 31.7 years of age, while in Chesapeake, its 31.3, in Norfolk, its 27.4, in Suffolk, its 33.6 and in Virginia Beach the average age is 28.9.

The 1990 Census Bureau rendered the following statistics on Race and Ethnic Groups in the Portsmouth population. Within the city, Whites make up 51.2%, African Americans - 47.3%, American Indians, Eskimo or Aleuts - 0.3%, Islanders - 0.8%, Hispanic Origins (may be any race) - 1.3%, and others -0.3%. It must be stated that the Census Bureau adjusted the data by July 25, 1991 (not yet published) to correct the possible undercounted or overcounted as a result of law suits filed by cities. The Census Bureau has conceded that racial and ethnic minority groups have been "undercounted" and "undercut" at a rate much higher than the general population. As of May 1992, African Americans in Portsmouth make up 53.0% of the populations. The African American population increased by 4.2%, while the White population declined by 5.3% Portsmouth's American Indian, Asia and Hispanic populations

are all relatively small, however these groups are posting significant increases.

The number of families in the city of Portsmouth in 1990 was 31,477; 1991 it was 31,830; 1992 it is 32,195; and the 1993 projected number is 32,564. A "family" as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, is "a household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption." The median family income in Portsmouth is as follows: 1990 - $28,880; 1991 - $29,618; 1992 - $30,288 and it is projected by 1993, the median family income will be $30,891.

The number of households in Portsmouth is 44,520, and it is projected to increase in 1993 to 45,203. As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, "a household includes all persons who occupy a housing unit." The median household income for 1992 is $25,079 and projected to increase in 1993 to $25,562.

Within the Hampton Roads area, Portsmouth has the highest percentage of unemployment, with 7.3%, while Chesapeake has 5.2%, Norfolk - 6.1%, Suffolk - 5.0% and Virginia Beach - 5.3%. Within the city of Portsmouth, 64% of the people own their home while 36% are renting. The median years at one address by residents in the city is 6.3 years.

Years At Address	
1 year or less	19%
13 months - 3 years	22%
4-5 years	7%
6-10 years	10%
11 + years	42%

V. TRENDS

Grove Baptist Church and its surrounding neighborhoods are experiencing great growth and restoration. Many are old neighborhoods with retired persons. The surrounding neighborhoods include Ebony Heights, Townpoint Apartments, Churchland North and Twin Pines. Since many of the older residents are dying, younger residents are buying or renting their homes. This has both pros and cons. The pros are that the communities will survive and a new youthful and vibrant crowd is joining the church. They are bringing new visions and talents to the community and to the church. They are coming and bringing their young children to our workshops and many other church-related activities for youths and parents. But when there are pros then cons, aren't far behind. Some younger people aren't as concerned or know the value of well kept neighborhoods. Many parents aren't keeping proper surveillance on their children. The crime rate in these communities have seen a slight increase, due to the filtering in of drugs and drug dealers. Since both parents properly work, their children are often left to

defend for themselves. The church must become more creative in providing some help and direction for these families.

Teenage pregnancies are increasing, and it is estimated that in the next 20 years it could cost the city $3.1 million. It is costing an average of $27,000 a year to house an inmate in prison. We must direct them in other ways. I see the need for some real economic, social justice issues being addressed in regards to the residents that are calling out for help. The Church needs to take a more aggressive approach and move from the conservative manner in which we deal with the ills of society. We must respond and stand as a church planted by God, that cannot be up-rooted nor destroyed.

A SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY

OF

MELVIN ORLANDO MARRINER

I can initiate this self-description and analysis of my life by quoting a portion of Langston Hughes' poem, "Mother to Son". "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, and splinters, and boards torn up, and places with no carpet on the floor, Bare. But all the time, I's been a-climbin' on and reachin' landin's and turnin' corners..." These events written by Langston Hughes speak metaphorically of my life's emotions and experiences. These experiences ushered me through psychological valleys and into precious moments of happiness and self-awareness. But, lest I misled anyone, my childhood nor life has been one of material poverty or need. Through God's Grace, my parents were provided with financial stability, who in turn provided me with the privilege and blessing to have my basic needs met and many personal wants. My poverty was one of self-denial and struggle. This identity struggle in which I consider a representative of poverty, caused many moments of frustration and uncertainty. Uncertainty in respect to who I was and the purpose of my existence. Because of these uncertainties, many careless decisions were undertaken, as well as, careless associations. I am aware that in the

developmental process of childhood, that it is natural to struggle with one's identity. But, my problems arose when I continued to struggle in my teens and even twenties with extremely negative thoughts of life and my existence. As I engage in thought and in writing about my "divine call" into the ministry, I am moved with awe at the awesome power of God. I know now, that God was moving me into his perfect plan of salvation. Let us continue to unfold the pages of my life that I believe to be instrumental in this gospel call.

After many days, months, and even years of trying to find the culprit for the negative outlook on life, I finally contributed much of it to the fact that I, never tried to raise my self-esteem, nor developed my past experiences. I was overwhelmingly concerned with what others thought of me, that I never investigated what I thought of myself. I never fulfilled my earlier goals, because I never set any. This identity conflict would follow me through most of my undergraduate studies. Now I can relate to what James Cone wrote in his book "My Soul Looks Back". "A person without a past is a person without an identity. And the absence of an identity is very serious, because without self-knowledge others can make you become what they desire." These statements of simple profoundness, clearly defines my

formative years growing up in a small suburban area in Chesapeake, Virginia called Bowers Hill.

Bowers Hill was a small community in which most people were related directly or indirectly and the oral tradition of spreading and knowing the town news was personified. This community embraced the old and needed tradition of adult neighbors taking an interest in your behavior and growth. In the center of this all black community was the domineering presence of a black baptist church. Little Zion Baptist Church shaped the lives and minds of many in the community, including mine.

I was born the only son and child to James and Magdalene Marriner on February 14, 1962. For the first twelve years of life, I was raised basically in a single parent household, even though my parents were happily married. Due to my father's military obligations to the United States Navy, I knew him only as a stranger, who brought gifts home and paid the bills. In this small community in which a host of cousins and other relatives resided, my father was the only one away from home, active in the armed forces. I never blamed my father for his absence, nor blamed him for the way in which he provided for his family, but simply missed him. The rich quality of our sharing and fellowship outweighed the quantity of time,

which was limited. I knew little about my father and his personality until my freshman year of high school. But, one thing my mother made me aware of, was that my father had a great love and devotion for his family, though physically absent. Even with this knowledge, I was determined to look down on myself and feel sorrow for what I did not have, rather than being thankful for what I had. But, what I had wasn't all I wanted and maybe needed. I wanted my father to teach me to ride a bike and even tie a necktie; things people take for granted. As I relate and express these thoughts, they may sound small, narrow, unimportant, and even meager, but they impacted my life in a traumatic way. My mother continued to hold us together, maintain a new home, and work a full-time job. My family expressed their love in a strong, and demanding fashion. If I was to respond to their love in a positive way, it had to be the response they wanted. Love enslaved me to the dependency on family, because their desire was to make all my decisions. I believe love must allow one to express themselves and learn from their own mistakes. I was not given the chance to find or define my likes nor dislikes. Who I would date, where I would go, was defined by what the women in my family would decide. Now, I have come to this conclusion, that with all the love, however expressed, their is nothing comparable to the love and presence of a strong Christian father. My father and I now share an unbreakable and loving

relationship. He has shown me the love and commitment needed to share and sustain my own family. My father also has shown me that love expresses itself at times through personal sacrifice. James Marriner is my mentor and role model.

My father's absence did not diminish the strength, commitment and love of my mother. My mother taught and insisted, without compromise, that I exhibit good values and behavior. Church attendance and participation was not a choice, it was a must in the Marriner household. The seed of Christianity was planted by my mother, who would always say, "don't forget about the Lord". For many years that seemed laid dormant, because I saw church as a means to fellowship only and not for true worship, nor a means for personal enrichment. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the various religious activities, such as the young adult ushers and other youth groups, but basically it was superficial to my acquaintance with God.

For many years, I struggled to find some aspect of my life that proved to be sufficient and meaningful. I never imagined that church would be the very place that I would define my existence. But now, I fully understand Proverbs 22.6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

I experimented with many avenues that proved to be "dead end" streets, and even "detour" signs. It became very discouraging and frustrating as I attempted to define and develop my existence and at the same time denying my independent "make up" of being made in the "Imago Dei", the Image of God, and submitting to negative influences of peer pressure. I wanted to be a part; I wanted to be accepted; I wanted people to think more of me than I thought of myself. I examined other means to add to my stature and character, by attempting to join the high school band, because I was not allowed to play sports until my sophomore year. Only to be denied because I lacked the proper rhythm. I was createdly and mentally destroyed, because the old stereotype was "that all blacks had rhythm and at least could beat drums." What was this declaring about my "blackness"? I was kindly directed to the school chorus and tormented myself, because I could not "carry a note in a paper bag". I still can't. These incidents along with others, did little to build positive self-esteem. The more I was rejected, the more I blamed and rebelled against God. At that juncture in life, I never imagined that my earlier aspirations, that turned into haunting hours of frustration, would later teach me that happiness comes initially through self-respect and appreciation. I had to conclude that, if one does not respect his/herself, then it may be impossible to recognize respect generated from others. As events flash

through my mind, I will attempt not to give every detail of my development and call to the greatest vocation on earth.

The 360 degree turn-around came my junior year in high school, when I really found myself and something I was good at. I was motivated by the allowance of my mother to participate in extra-curricular activities. I regained appreciation for God and the church when I was allowed to experiment with untapped talents. Some said, "I was a natural born athlete". These athletic talents gave me an opportunity to be offered many scholarships, but most of all an opportunity to appreciate my worth. My perspective on life changed drastically as I began to build positive self-esteem and a warm appetite for myself. Because of my religious background, I thanked God for giving me these athletic talents that opened doors for many awards and honors. I learned more from track than sprinting and more from football than catching a ball. I learned self-discipline, perseverance and that the game of life is not over until the final seconds are gone. I had to play my best, by thinking positive and realistic of my abilities, regardless of how others played. Therefore, when the great tragic of my life occurred, I was able to confront it head on. My knee was severely damaged (torn ligaments) while playing football and I could not fulfill the scholarship agreements. All that I worked for had now been washed away;

or has it. The acceptance and appreciation for self was continually being built and that alone kept my "head above water". Although, I witnessed many positive changes, I continued to wrestle with some insecurities and frustrations that I had not dealt with.

I graduated from Western Branch High in 1979 and attended Norfolk State University. My major was Political Science, with an emphasis in Public Administration. I was nominated and selected as Mr. Political Science and Vice-President of the Political Science Department. God was working in my life and I did not acknowledge his handiwork. I pledged a prestigious fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, in the Spring of 1981. I journeyed farther away from the church, because I became sidetracked by the popularity I never knew. But, there remained a void or emptiness, that popularity, fraternal brotherhood, activities or female companionship could not fill.

Finally, while going through many personal struggles, I found what I so desperately needed. The knowledge and fulfilling came through conflicts and the tragic awakening through the death of a loved one. In April of 1982, death tipped-toed upon my grandfather and salvation surfaced to my spirit. My grandfather was the backbone of the family. He loved us (grandchildren) so much that he would tolerate no

foolishness. His death moved me to the point that now I had to weigh in the balances of my mind the odds of love. That is, if I truly loved my grandfather, then I had to re-encounter, and embrace the God he so dearly loved and taught us about. I realized that God and the church was what I desperately needed. I can relate to Isaiah 6:1a when he declares "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne..." My grandfather's death awaken that dormant seed that had been planted years ago by my mother.

I currently hear this similar story coming from my parishioners, of the shocking, locking jaws of death bringing them into the reality of Jesus, and yet it remains the authentic catalyst that pole-vaulted me into an awareness and association with Christ. I committed my life to Christ in June of 1982 and it filled the void that had long existed. When I embraced Christ, I also embraced myself. Salvation has been both exciting and adventurous. It has brought peace and comfort to a troubled and confused mind. I found that I could appreciate myself without any external strings attached. Could it be, that I would find true happiness in God and the church that I once abandoned? Or was this discussion solely based on hurt, loss, and hopelessness? I answer with an emphatic YES! Regardless of my motivation, I had made a sincere decision to invite

Christ into my life, to stay. I dedicated my time and mind to learning more about this Jesus that "saved" my soul.

After about a year of dedication to God, the church and to many hours of study, I responded to the Divine Call of God to enter the Gospel ministry. I knew that I was "called" when I no longer had to ask anyone "How do you know you are called to preach?" I heard no "voices," I saw nothing in the "clouds," but I did along with my desire, feel the presence of God beckoning me to entreat this challenge. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit..."(Romans 8:16). I did not run from the "call," but praised God for wanting to do this great and wonderful thing in my life. It's an honor for me to preach and even pastor. I had no idea what would take place or what the future held for me, but I did know that I was fulfilled and happy.

While I was receiving and accepting my "call", my cousin James E. King was accepting his "call" as well. The Lord and the Pastor of Little Zion Baptist Church, Rev. A. G. Pruiett, worked it out that both King and I would preach our initial sermon on the same day. It was a day and experience to remember. Rev. Pruiett fought a hard campaign with the officers of the church who felt that we were too young to preach. On June 10, 1983, we preached our first sermon and were both licensed the same day. My text was

Luke 5:3-8 and my subject was "Take Him at His Word". Amazingly, the old negative thoughts and frustrations were overshadowed by the awesome power of God. My "call" continues and shall continue until Jesus returns for his church.

On November 24, 1984, God allowed another great event to take place in my life. I married the former Melody A. Coleman of Virginia Beach, Virginia. She was and is the answer to my prayers and has been a great asset to my ministry. We are blessed to have two sons, Courtland James, who is 5 years old and Melvin Isaiah who is 18 months old.

In September 1984, encouraged and feeling the strong desire for seminary training, I enrolled and entered Virginia Union University's School of Theology, in Richmond, Virginia. As I recall the first day of class, I remember an "awe" spirit come over me. I was thankful that I had been led to make this decision. It was exposed in the "dark room of my mentality, the undeveloped film I used to be, compared to the black and white picture that God has brought forth." I'm still working on becoming all I can be in Christ and looking forward to the day when God makes me a "full color portrait in Christ." Words cannot describe the joys and blessings of my seminary experience. It has filled my life with great anticipation of things God has prepared for me.

Through this training, my spiritual and ministerial pace skyrocketed to unseen heights. In 1987, I was offered a position of Assistant to the Pastor at the Shiloh Baptist Church, under the pastorate of Dr. John H. Foster. This experience helped to launch my personal confidence as well as my spiritual growth. I graduated from Virginia Union University with a Master of Divinity degree that same year.

Through these changes, my faith in God has been expanded to heights never imagined. I give testimony that "it is not by power nor by might, but by my Spirit saith the Lord," that I have come this far. As I sought to make my life a reflection of Jesus, and how to better serve his people, God directed me to my present pastorate. In September 1989, God opened the doors for me through the obedience of his people at Grove Baptist Church; the oldest African American Baptist Church in the city of Portsmouth, Virginia (152 years old), as its thirteenth Pastor. Thus far, my ministry at this church has been both successful and effective. I do not measure success only by the large host of new members, but also by a reorientation of congregates' old ideologies into effective and productive ministry. My emphasis thus far has been pastoral counseling and empowering people to actively involve themselves in Kingdom building. I view the ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ to be the most effective way in dealing with the ills of

society. To share His teachings is to share what the world needs most, and that is love and a feeling of self-worth. As a person that has gone "personality poverty", I depend deeply on the Holy Spirit to direct my work, since this is a part of His work. The congregation in which I serve has been very encouraging and prayerful in my intentions to further pastoral training, to better serve them. As of January 1992, I enrolled at United Theological Seminary, in Dayton, Ohio as a Wright-Kunjufu Fellow and seek my Doctor of Ministry Degree in Afrocentric Pastoring and Preaching.

In conclusion, I simply say "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

As a context for ministry is considered, I find Grove Baptist Church and its surrounding communities to be an exceptional base for my program focus. Grove Baptist Church was the first baptist slave church organized and built in 1840 in Portsmouth, Virginia. After serious consideration by the white "mother church," Sycamore Hill Baptist Church (now, Churchland Baptist) to preserve the strong status of its Negro members, several hundred, who had proven their Christian worth, been faithful to their God, their fellowmen and their Christian masters were allowed to branch off with white supervision. The area surrounding Grove Church has some of the oldest established African American communities in the city of Portsmouth. Because of the rich history and respect for Grove Church and surrounding communities, this project of addressing the many problems of African American relationships promises to be challenges, but yet fulfilling. Within the Churchland area, there are approximately seventeen churches in Grove's zip code (23703) area, with Grove being the only African American Baptist Church. This means that the church is highly visible, respected, and in a great area to do ministry.

The church, very much like the city, is experiencing great and rapid growth, with the median age in the city

being 31.7 and the church being 42.7 years of age. Since many of the older residents are dying, younger residents are primarily renting or buying their homes. This has both pros and cons. The pros are that the communities will survive and a new youthful and vibrant generation is joining the church. They are bringing new visions and talents to the community and to the church. But, with the growing population, the church is called to take on broader responsibilities in cultivating the lives of people who may not have any concept of family. I have also experienced with some young couples, that they are unwilling to sacrifice and manage their relationship and other personal affairs but are rather seeking immediate gratification. Countless hours are spent counseling, primarily due to the disenchantment with the institutes of marriage, misunderstanding of what constitutes a normal relationship and social economic ills that threaten the well-being of the African American community. Many images of what some define as gold marriages have been falsely portrayed to African Americans by the media and Hollywood. Hollywood has been "satanic" in its approach and depiction of marriage and family values. Many of these shows generate entertainment and laughter, but lack any positive or realistic message. Let us examine two sitcoms that offer two extremes but with no balance, which suggests that those we look to, for entertainment are contributing largely to the negative and

unrealistic perception of marriage. Two sitcoms that are opposite on the letter of extreme are "Married with Children" is simply encouraging contempt for leadership; and relationship, while "The Cosby Show" portrays African American relationships as some "snow white" fairy tale.

I honestly do not believe that shows of this nature are intended to enhance or promote marital balance or bliss, but it is indeed promoting despair and hopelessness by humor. I do not want to seem dogmatic, but simply want to offer another opinion. I strongly wish that actor/entertainer Bill Cosby would have been just as critical about his unrealistic portrayal of the African American family as he is opposed to the destructive images offered by his colleagues in comedy on "Death Comedy Jam", which is hosted by Martin Lawrence. (The show "Martin" is another story). I am not suggesting that Hollywood portray African Americans as maids or servants only, both rather depict us in a non-stereotype and realistic fashion. If our relationships are to survive the external and internal demolition of racism, mis-education and a lack of self-awareness, then the words of our elders need to come into effect. Those words as they relate to marriage are "its what you make it". Productive relationships are not automatic, they must be created, established and maintained.

One thing that I have noticed in the countless hours of marital counseling, primarily with younger couples, is the notion that happiness should occur simply because they have soil "I do" without struggle and endurance. I am under the impression that many have little idea of what they are saying "I do" to. The lack of proper biblical understanding coupled with emotions and eagerness to be together has handicapped many persons from really investigating what they are saying. "I do" also refers to understanding that "the race is not given to the swift nor the strong, but with those who endure unto the end (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Happiness and fulfillment is a daily attempt and occurrence, not a single event. What has tragically happened, is that many have a religious background and have not received biblical teaching.

If relationships are based on the notion "its what you make it" then the investigation must start with "you" as it relates to your ideology of self. Who or what is the center of your life, giving your life meaning and direction? What contributes to the formulation of how your perceive and function within a given relationship? Where do you turn or feel comfortable in turning when your relationship is in jeopardy? It is my belief that God has provided through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through his local church the proper responses to these and many other

questions concerning the maintenance of relationships. The Christian Church clearly must articulate that Christ not only sacrificed his life to restore the broken relationship between the Creator and the creation, but also to restore proper relationship between humanity. If humanity continues to reject each other, it in essence is rejecting God. The words of Christ bounce in my spirit when he utters "if ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me". (Matthew 25:40). Those embracing the Soteriology and Christology of Jesus must also embrace the infirmities of the weak and help them to victory.

The African American family has its strengths and weaknesses. It is unfortunate that our strengths are often overlooked by many researchers and in particular the media, but most of all, us as victims. If we meditate more upon our weakness, we begin to live and respond from our weakness. These undiscussed strengths are directly tied to the theology of the African American church. Considering the enormity of racism upon our race which is the major cause of family breakdowns, the time has certainly come to re-establish the critical necessity of family and church cooperation. Another major cause in family breakdowns is that the church has slacked in being an extension and support system for the family. The African American church in America developed out of the deprivation and oppression

experienced by the slaves. In so doing, the African American church existed as a support system for the uprooted at society's breakpoint. Without question, the worst break point in slavery was the separation of family members from one another. The church evolved as a new family for those who were continually being uprooted from their original families. Sadly, and the reason for my focus, is that the church no longer occupies the central position of authority and respect in the life of African Americans that it once did. People who are the most broken are people who also are at the lower end of the social-economic scale. The church at one time even made these persons feel self pride and self-respect. Studies indicate that it is primarily this group of the so-called underclass that is not being reached by churches. Thus, it becomes our church's responsibility in changing this trend in our community.

Grove has become the base of communal activities for self-help, nourishment of social pride and intellect, and mutual insurance in the case of calamity. The congregation has the available resources to create a major turn-around in the church's interaction with its community. The congregation consists of a well-balanced array of spiritual, financial, cultural and social-economic people. The church must take an active role in teaching and nullifying misconceptions that tend to destroy the core of life for

African Americans. No longer can we simply shout about "going to heaven", while we "catch hell" here on earth. It is my focus to bring our Christian faith and resources to bear on our everyday situations. For if we are to have healthy communities, then we first must have healthy family relationships.

I can personally remember when I was struggling in my first and formative years of marriage, that I turned to the church and its leaders to give proper guidance and nurturing. I sought trained persons only to come away with these words, "don't worry, God will make a way". If this message which is indeed true, is the only message offered by the church to those oppressed, broken and struggling, then we are worst off than previously thought. It was through my endless search for a response from God and His church that my marriage has been made stronger. The church must bring the "word of God" to life in the lives of African Americans being annihilated by the pressures confronting them. The loudest voice should not be that of politicians, statisticians or physicians, but theologians and the church. The church's responsibility is to address the wholistic needs of its people. Churches must develop ways to build bridges that years of "lazy affair" has brought between it and the community. There is no greater institution with the strength and support from an omnipotent God than that of the

church. Myron R. Cartier in the Nature and Mission of the Church (unpublished paper prepared for Faculty Theological Collogrium at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary) states that "the Gospel has the power to liberate men and women from the contemporary forms of enslavement in a new community, the church. Central to Christian community is an intimate relationship with God through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. The same spirit has led these believers into a reconciling interpersonal relationship with one another. Indeed the Gospel of God binds men and women to one another as well as to God."

It is my program focus to at least re-awaken the consciousness of the church to a greater mission and responsibility to those seeking to discover hope in the midst of their despair. As we examine the history of African Americans, the family has managed to survive in spite of societal exigencies, largely through the influence and inspiration of the church. If this relationship was successful in the past, then it warrants revitalization, because it is unquestionable that African American marriages are suffering. But, this sense of suffering has been the network out of which the African American family and church have struggled to overcome the damages of slavery and continued racism.

God has invested a great deal of sacrifice and grace in order that oneness might be a sense of reality here on earth. The Apostle Paul by the wise counsel of God wrote in Ephesians 5:20-33 that clearly connects the oneness of Godhead with the oneness of marriage.

> "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." (King James Version)

African American christians must not continue to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God", whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption. Many are grieving the Holy Spirit because we have decided to experience on our own, how to make our marriage work apart from God. And, what this

approach has done is to bring unnecessary hardships on our marriage, which has rendered many of them dysfunctional. Marriages cannot and will not be fully whole unless God is the supreme source. God is the manufacturer of marriage and we cannot effectively use God's product without God's rule book. Many are trying to use the product without reading and understanding the instructions.

It is my strong belief that Christianity was originally an African religion. Therefore, it is my contention that marriages can be strengthen by proper biblical understanding, while at the same time investigating the importance of African tradition and culture. The term Africentric is a term that was introduced by Dr. Molefi K. Asante.

> "Afrocentricity is pro-African and consistent in its beliefs that technology belongs to the world; Afrocentricity is African genius and African values created, reconstructed, and derived from our history and experiences in our best interests. If one understands properly African history, an assumption can never be made that Afrocentricity is a back to 'anything' movement. It is an uncovering of one's true self, it is the pinpointing of one's center, and it is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate. Maintenance and survival are no longer adequate terminology to pass on to the next generation. Our presence in the future is undisputed, but maintenance nor survival will insure our propriety or prominence."[3]

As the African American church strives to be practical in its approach and application of its faith, it must

understand that Africentricity will help expand or enhance one's centeredness in Jesus Christ rather than replacing Christocentism. It is an approach that should enhance African American marriages.

THE AFRICAN HERITAGE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

The importance of our African American heritage for wholesome African American marriages can be quickly and simply stated by Dr. C. Tsehloane as he shares this West African saying;

> If you do not know where you are or
> where you have been,
> you cannot know where you are going-
> and, if you do not know where you are
> going,
> any road will take you there.[4]

It must be clearly defined and understood that the history and the heritage of the African American people does not begin or end with slavery. It goes far back into ancient Africa, back to the origins of Genesis 2:24, dealing with the creation of humanity and the rise of civilization. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, a mentor for "Africentric Preaching and Pastoring" at United Theological Seminary, states;

> It is important to start at the right
> place, for if we start at slavery, we
> would simply whin up as slaves. But, if
> we start in Africa, we would celebrate
> our royalty.[5]

Many of our marriages have started with the notion that Europe offers the best model for marriage, when in fact Europe and America have the highest divorce rate in the

world. Dr. Kunjufu reports that Ghana has only a five percent divorce rate, while America has at least fifty percent. This alone warrants careful attention and investigation to the African heritage as it relates to relationships. It is obvious that African Americans have assimilated to the customs and values that European Americans have developed. This assimilation has been destructive; it simply has not worked and the shedding of this western culture is essential to the development of the African American family.

Ra Un Nefer Amen states that:

> When we were brought into slavery we were stripped of the knowledge of our cultural heritage. Among the 100 million killed in the Atlantic Slave Holocaust (dare not call it 'trade,' for that is a dignified practice) were millions of sages, priests, kings, Queen Mothers, poets, and elders--people who possessed the knowledge of the correct social organization that made Africa great. As if this were not enough, we were subsequently bestialized by the practice that bred us like cattle. Black men were treated as studs, and Black women, as livestock breeders. Add to this, the practice of breaking up families--children from their parents, wives from the husbands--it is a wonder that we were able to survive as a people. Yet we held on. We managed to hold on to some of those wise old traditions we brought with us. Memories that we speak of with proud fondness when we tell each other about those values and ways that our grandparents down south used to have. Memories that are driving us relentlessly to reclaim our heritage, which is the key to our

> dignity as human beings. Let no one mistake it. Afrocentricity is not about building self-esteem. It is about living with dignity as a human being.[6]

It has been proven through archaeological excavations, examination of fossil remains and DNA research that the first homo sapiens were located in Africa over some 200,000 years ago. "Emery and Yale University confirmed findings that there was indeed a single female ancestor who lived about 200,000 years ago."[7] Scientists are calling this female "Eve."

> "What was Eve like? She was a dark-haired, dark-skinned, dark-eyed woman of about twenty-five years when she died. Scientists say that she was as muscular as contemporary tennis star Martina Navratilova but probably stronger. She lived in a family group of about twenty-five people. Her genes are now in all of the 5 billion living people in the world, without regard to race, creed, color, or national origin. She has been said to be our ten-thousandth great-grandmother."[8]

What these scientists are ultimately saying is that there is a common human heritage who's genes is in Africa. The people migrated from Africa to other parts of the world and over time taking on the characteristics which enabled them to survive in different climates and regions. Scientists have determined that it takes only a thousand years for color pigmentation and other physical features to change completely. They took on characteristics which enable them to adapt to their new climates. Thus they might look differently, act differently, and speak different languages,

but the essence of their humanity, gained in Africa, did not change.

Dr. Stephen Jay Gould, the Harvard University paleontologist and essayist, put the matter in this profound way: "It makes us realize that all human beings, despite differences in external appearance, are really members of a single entity that's had a very recent origin in one place. There is a kind of biological brotherhood that's much more profound than we ever realized."[9]

African history and heritage offers significant contributions to the stability of African American marriages and family life. When we discuss African history, we are also speaking of ancient Egypt. Scholars such as the late Professor Cheikh Anta Diop, Director of the Radiocarbon Laboratory and the Fundamental Institute of Black Africa at the University of Dakar in West Africa; Martin Bernal, Professor of Government Studies at Cornell University; Dr. Yosef ben-Jochannan, formerly Adjunct Professor of History and Egyptology at Cornell University; Ivan Van Sertima, Professor of African Studies at Rutgers University; Dr. Asa Hilliard, Calloway Professor of Education and Psychology at Georgia State University; and Charles S. Finch M.D., Professor of Community Medicine at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, have identified several means of

verifying Egyptian's African identity. "Primary among these are the portraits of themselves which they left showing African features. Moreover, in their own writings they identified their origin as black Africa. Indeed, until about 200 years ago, the Greeks, Romans, Hebrews and others who studied in ancient Egypt had no difficulty attributing this advanced civilization to native Africans. Martin Bernal's two-volume study is perhaps the most definitive in establishing the link between the ancient Egyptian civilization and the later Greek and Roman civilizations."[10] The ancient Egyptians gave their homeland the name of Kemet.

> These black Egyptians were gifted original and creative scientists, engineers, astronomers, mathematicians, artists, philosophers, teachers, farmers, horticulturists, orchardists, arborists and master's at building. "They were deeply religious or spiritual and saw no distinction between the spiritual, the intellectual and the physical elements of the universe and of man. They were strongly devoted to the family as a pattern of organization. Statues, carvings, drawings, and paintings of almost all the gods, kings, noblemen, and priests show them with wives, children, sisters, brothers, or extended kin."[11]

> The Egyptian civilization contributed strongly to the concept of family and the importance of the extended family. E. A. Wallis Budge has said, "The Egyptian was in all periods of his history a lover of this home and family, and the relations between parents and their children were usually of the most affectionate character. His world was the village where his home was and his

> kinsfolk were the only inhabitants that counted in his sight."[12]

Marriage was highly sanctioned and regularly practiced. To find a family and establish a house was deemed to be the responsibility of every virtuous man. Most of the five stone statues of African kings showed them with their wives. The great statue of Ramses II and his southern-born wife is an outstanding example. Despite or alongside polygamy, strong emphasis was placed on love and honor between husband and wife. Ptah Hotep, one of the most venerable Egyptian priests, who lived about 2500 years before Christ, laid down certain guidelines for the family:

> If thou wouldst be wise [or prosperous] establish for thyself [get married]. Love thou thy wife in the house wholly and rightly. Fill. her belly and clothe her back; oil for anointing is the medicine for her limbs. Make her heart to rejoice as long as thou livest; she is a field profitable to her lord. Enter not into disputes with her. She will withdraw herself before violence. Make her to prosper permanently in thy house.13

> "A distinctive and often misunderstood feature of African family patterns was the acceptance of polygynous marriages. Supported by long-standing and highly honored traditions, rules and regulations, a husband took plural wines. This often occurred when there was a shortage of men. In African societies where there was a shortage of women, the practice of plural husbands, called polyandry, was also sanctioned. In either situation, the rights, responsibilities, and duties of each

> member of the family were understood and protected. From all indications, polygynous marriages were as functional as monogamous ones."[14]

Responsibilities were met forsaken, and there was a strong commitment for the well-being of others beyond one's own selfish needs and desires.

There is much more that ancient Africa can teach us about ourselves and our relationships that warrants an indepth investigation. We are the beneficiaries of a heritage that can in turn be made better or worse by our contributions or lack of it, in each successive generation. Understanding our heritage helps us remember the many blessings of God and the blood, sweat and tears of our foreparents.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH AT THE CROSS ROAD

Generally speaking, the African American Christian church stands at the "Cross Road" of decision and change. The decision is to become more spiritually and practically creative in actually confronting the satanic forces that come to divide and conquer relationships, especially the institution of marriage. The change may be based upon one's context of ministry and after careful and prayerful analysis, proper changes will be more easily directed.

Reverend T. J. Jermison, president of the 8.7 million member National Baptist Convention U.S.A. said during its 1991 annual convention in Washington, D.C., that "We must take care of our own. We have tried other institutions and they have failed. The church must bring the black family back to where it belongs." The African American church has shown that religious orientation especially Christianity, is one of the greatest historic strengths of the family.

Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, professor and chairperson of the Department of African Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, though not a component of the church is fair in his analysis of it.

He states that:

> The black church is the single most authoritative religious force within our community. It is, furthermore, our only continuous anchor to the orighas, laos and ancestors of our past. Still the church has served both as dissuader and catalyst in our most necessary social and political struggles. Yet because it is seldom consciously Afrocentric, it is often a controversial institution. The nature of the controversy reveals the fundamental weakness of the church which unfortunately seems little altered by the debates over objectives, functions and rituals. There has to be a general regeneration of the black church. Possibly, this renewal, might occur simultaneously with the foreseeable intellectual resurrection. Nonetheless, whether or not its transformation occurs in conjunction with a general black awakening, it must occur. Without the full participation of the church, we cannot have a genuine re-creation. In fact, our history shows that the church, sooner or later, establishes itself as transmitter of the new visions within our community."[15]

The "Black" church did not originate in America or Europe but rather in Africa. The core of the African and the African American life was their God-consciousness. The African American church is the only social institution of the African Americans which started in the African forest and survived slavery; under the leadership of priest or medicine man, afterward the Christian pastor, the church preserved in itself the remnants of African tribal life and became after emancipation the core of African American social life. Dr. Asante, suggest further that "We are a people in tune with our God-force whether in a night club or a church."[16] While Dr. Asante asserts that the African American Christian Church has not been Afrocentric but, "the music and dance of the church may be the essence of our Africanity. What I mean by this is that the panorama of Africa is not merely unfolded but expanded and amplified in the religious drama. More than this, the church services become a collective outpouring of the soul with people getting more possessed than others but no one really escaping the influence of possession even if it is no more than the slight tapping of the foot. Syncopated pianos and organs

> and hand-clapping often drive the faithful into ecstasy. The rhythms run to be free, individuals shout and moan, the preacher directs this "mass madness," which is really not madness, by the call and response, and suddenly the whole congregation is praising the Lord. This is truly an African expression, imitated by white evangelicals who first saw African slaves "getting religion." What the African were getting, however, was the same ecstatic combinations produced by the polymeters of African music. In the place of drums, the African Americans substituted hand-clapping, foot-stomping, head-shaking, body-moving rhythm-all in an attempt to drive the self into further possession, by the Lord. While this does not occur in all black churches, it is the general experience of those traditional black churches which have emerged out of the roots of our past.[17]

There is no doubt that the church and the Spirit of God have been the instruments for the survival of African Americans. "At times the church seems as though the Spirit is willing but the flesh (body/church) is weak." The church has the divine influence and power to revamp its ministry to those who are married and severely struggling. We have seen many positive changes by the church, but the problems of marriage, divorces and family breakdown are so severe that we must keep on launching forward. The question is, "Can the church keep pace with programs and ministries, to combat the high rate of divorce in our communities?" In response to this question, my answer is a resounding yes. "We can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us (Phillipian 4:13)." With a practical approach and application of God's Word, we can and will see a major difference in the lives of those that search for it.

Dr. T. J. Jemison says, "that the Church is doing more specific things than it ever has before, especially in the area of counseling young Black families on how to deal with the ills of our times." In August 1993, Ebony published a special issue on "The New Black Family." Starting on page 94, they address the issue of the "Changing Church Confronts The Changing Black Family." They interviewed nine religious leaders and this is what they had to say:

Dr. T. J. Jemison, President, National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc.

> "The Black family as an entity must be given more attention and made to be a vital part of the activities of the church every day, not just on Sundays."

Bishop Louis Henry Ford, Presiding Bishop, Church of God in Christ.

> "People expect children to do their own thing, but they must be guided by parents because they learn by precept and example."

Bishop Philip R. Cousin, Chairman, General Board, African Methodist Episcopal Church.

> "The No. 1 concern of the Black family has to be the reclamation of the Black male... But...we must make certain that we don't isolate the Black female."

Bishop Ruben L. Speaks, Senior Bishop, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

> "The Black Church, while always guided by certain ideals and principles, must now strive to be more wholistic in its approach to life."

The Rev. Nan Arrington Peete, Cannon to the Ordinary, Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta.

> "The Church has been out there (helping the family), but on a small scale. We've taken a lot of Band-Aid approaches, providing overnight housing instead of seeking out ways to transform systems."

Dr. Jamie T. Phelps, Associate Professor, Catholic Theological Union.

> "Every Black Church needs to be more in touch with the contemporary stresses and realities of the lives of the people. Too many church officials, she says, are too far removed from the daily ordeals of the members, which may include homelessness, joblessness or recent incarceration."

Dr. E. Edward Jones, President, National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.

> "Black people need to come back to the Church where family values and morals are extolled...And the Black Church must again provide [an atmosphere] where people feel comfortable."

Bishop C. D. Coleman, Senior Bishop, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

> "The Church used to be an isolated place where you meet God and save souls, but now the emphasis also ought to be on saving the body and the mind and instilling moral principles...."

Dr. Charles G. Adams, President, Progressive National Baptist Convention.

> "I remain a prisoner of hope; I think there is more of a positive character about the family than there is a negative pathology, and the Black family is still very, very strong."

As we listen to theologians, pastors and other Christian leaders, we find a common thread of hope and honesty flowing throughout their messages. This

common thread is, that the church has done great things, but now in need of some drastic reforms. The church must continue to show social relevance, in addition to a clear proclamation of the gospel. "Churches must find the means for coordinating their efforts to deal with systematic problems which afflict their constituencies."[18] We can no longer be considered as a "sleeping giant." The African American Church is challenged to prepare couples for stable marriages and offer then support after the "I do's." With this in mind, the African American Church does have the strength and theology which not only has potential to deal with the problems of marriage, but also has a theology which can educate persons of all races to the warmth a church can develop if that church begins to understand how it has potential to function as an extended family.

Equipping Armorbearers for Marital Counseling

Preliminary Instructions

It is essential that the pastor of any congregation rid him/herself and many parishioners from the notion that pastors must be the only counselor in the church. Pastors should not consentingly or unconsentingly be expected to play the role of "lone ranger" ministering to the family. It has been both customary and unfortunate that many African American pastors have taken on this impossible task of becoming "jack of all trades but a master of none." This is primarily due to the fact that parishioners demand to talk and be counseled by only one person; and that's usually the pastor. Inevitable pastors will become "burnt out" and the ministry and the people will suffer loss. The wise counsel of Jethro, a African/Edenic priest to his son-in-law Moses needs to be re-examined, understood and then applied to the way ministry is done.

> The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit along, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide

> between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said (Exodus 18:13 NRSV).

Likewise, Paul's letter to the church at Ephesians writes that the pastor's responsibility is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..."(Ephesians 4:12 NRSV). Therefore, the ministry must be viewed as mobilizing and empowering others to involve themselves in doing Christian ministry.

At this point, let me briefly offer a working definition of what a armorbearer is. A armorbearer is one who assists or bears the armor or arms of a warrior. The

pastor is seen as one who leads the war against satanic division, while others are assisting in carrying out the strategies to combat the enemy. The pastor cannot lead and then be expected to bear the responsibility of carrying out all of his/her strategies. The pastor must equip other believers or armorbearers for the work of ministry and building up or making strong the body of Christ. Therefore, the first stage in this project was to identify persons who are committed Christians and that are trainable for a counseling ministry. In my context of ministry here at Grove Baptist Church, I identified ten Africentric Christians who had previous training and/or a degree in social work, human service counseling or psychology. These selected armorbearers need not have been experienced persons, but simply persons who want and are capable of doing ministry. These ten persons have indeed proven to be a great asset to the counseling ministry. After identifying a working group of armorbearers, it then became my task to prepare them for counseling by explaining what basic counseling was and was not. These contextual associates and I met one hour a week for five weeks. Of course, the time table can be based on the size of one's congregation and the extent of one's focus of ministry.

Counseling: What and Why

I. What is Counseling?

A. What counseling is not:

1. advice giving
2. scripture quoting
3. sin rebuking
4. preaching
5. mind reading
6. puzzle solving
7. experimental
8. guilt places

B. What counseling is:

1. guiding
2. educating
3. blockage removing
4. encouraging
5. sharing disclosing
6. listening
7. helping
8. restoring
9. prevention

II. Who is qualified to do Christian counseling?

A. Persons who are committed and sensitive Christians who recognize counseling as:

1. a ministry
2. a process

3. a relationship
4. a challenge
5. communicating
6. influencing

B. Persons who will demonstrate some of the following characteristics:

1. appreciation of self and culture - Matthew 22:39
2. warmth - Galatians 6:1,2
3. concern - Galatians 5:7
4. courage to confront in love - 2 Corinthians 6:11-13
5. genuineness - 2 Corinthians 7:1
6. empathy - 2 Corinthians 2:1
7. love - Corinthians 13
8. knowledge - Romans 15:14
9. direction - 2 Timothy 1:8-12
10. discernment -
11. trust -
12. humility -
13. humanness -
14. prayerfulness - Colossians 1:1-14
15. hope -
16. patience - 1 Thessalonians 5:14

III. Where to counsel.

A. Establish a comfortable but yet professional like setting, because it;

1. offers structure to the session
2. promotes confidentiality

B. Avoid compromising situations

1. isolated places
2. private homes

IV. The counselor's resource:

A. The Bible

1. The centrality of the Word
   a. Hold it - 2 Timothy 1:13
   b. Teach it - 2 Timothy 2:2
   c. Study it - 2 Timothy 2:15
   d. continue in it - 2 Timothy 3:14
   e. grow wise in it - 3:15
   f. grow up in it - 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

B. Other counseling literature

C. The Wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

1. Believing that the Holy Spirit will finish the equipping.
2. Knowing when to refer counselors to additional help.

VI. Listening

A. Proverbs 18:13 (NRSV). If one gives an answer before hearing, it is a folly and a shame.

B. Hearing is passive but listening is active.

C. Keys to good listening:

1. Limit your own talking-You cannot talk and listen at the same time.
2. Turn off your own worries-This is not always easy, but you cannot effectively counsel when your problems are in the fore-front.
3. Concentrate-Focus your mind on what the counselee(s) is saying and practice shutting out outside distractions.
4. Ask questions-If you do not understand something or feel you may have missed a point, clear it up now before it embarrasses you later.
5. Do not interrupt-A pause, even a long pause does not always mean he/she is finished saying everything the counselee(s) wanted to.
6. Take notes-This will help you remember important points. But be selective. Trying to note down everything the counselee(s) says can result in being left far behind or in retaining irrelevant details.
7. Listen for ideas and not just words-The counselor needs to get as much understanding as possible and not just isolated bits and pieces.

8. React to ideas and not the person-Do not allow irritation at things the counselee(s) may say or their manner to distract you.
9. Interjections-An occasional "Yes", "I see" and etc...will express to the counselee(s) that you are interested in their crisis.
10. Do not jump to conclusions-Avoid making unwarranted assumptions about what the counselee(s) is going to say or mentally trying to complete their sentences for them.

Active listening enables us to hear the emotions, hurts and attitudes behind the content of what is being stated. It is not only what counselees say but how they look and how they say it. We must listen for anger, hurt, fear, frustration, bitterness, anxiety, shame, guilt, resentment and a sense of hope or hopelessness. Effective listening says Clarence Walker "involves more than the use of one's ears, it also involves the use of one's spiritual gut... Listening communicates empathy. For many blacks in counseling, listening may prove to be therapy enough. African Americans commonly feel that no one listens and empathizes with their plight. Counselors will not be able to right all the wrongs done to their black clientele nor remove the misfortunes that befall them. But with the compassion of Christ counselors who demonstrate through

active listening that they are at least willing to hear the pain their counselees experience."[19]

VI. The 7 S's of Counseling

A. Servant (Christlikeness-humanility)

Mark 9:35 - And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

B. Strong (Boldness in the Spirit)

Phil. 1:20 - ...according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in everything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

C. Sunny (Joy of the Lord)

John 15:11 - "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

D. Sweet (Love of Jesus)

Mt. 22:39 - "And a second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

E. Sensitive (Listening and Obedient spirit)

I Cor. 2:10 - For to us God revealed them through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

F. Secretive (What you hear is between you, the counselee, and the Lord)

Prov. 16:28 - A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.

G. Submissive (Obedience to the Lord and those in authority)

Eph. 6:5 - Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

Once this basic information was shared and received with the armorbearers or counselors concerning the ministry of counseling, I then wanted them to understand the importance of an Africentric approach to marital counseling.

Lecture

...what shall I tell my dear ones raised in a white world. A place where white has been made to represent all that is good and pure and fine and decent, where clouds are white and dolls, and heaven surely is a white, white place...

-Margaret Burroughs

Believe it or not, this view has been quite common throughout America and the assimilation by Africans to America culture has contributed a great deal to the problems African Americans now face. We married a system that does not work in our best interest. African American marriages have been viewed and portrayed by the media as something less than desirable. The philosophy "while in Rome do as the Romans do" has led many African Americans to be forcibly raped and even to offer up their African culture for the common Western culture. The problem is that when one loses their identity for any reason they began to feel "less than." Therefore, the tendency to hop from one concept to another, is very common. It appears that there is not only a "spiritual war" being waged in our mind as Paul refers to in Romans 7:15-23, but also a "cultural war" of what is innate and what was planted by the slave masters. A old wise tale says that "you can take the boy out of the country, but you cannot take the country out of the boy." When the country is pulled out of the boy all that is left is chaos and division. Because Africa and African concepts have been twisted and tied into lies, it has left false conclusions about marriage, the extended family and about God. Armorbearers/counselors can help couples and individuals obtain a balance view that they might have life and have it more abundantly.

Before we proceed let us clearly define what culture is and is not. A book by Ra Un Nefer Amen entitled An Afrocentric Guide to a Spiritual Union offers us an excellent definition of culture. "Most people fail to examine culture as the fundamental source of the behavior of the majority of people, because they have been trained to think of culture as specifically pertaining to the arts (music, painting, literature, clothing, etc.). To gain a clear understanding of the term 'culture' we must reference it with its opposite 'wild' (thing's that live and grow in their original, natural state). The term 'culture' pertains, then, to the group of terms that include agriculture, cultivate, cult, cultigen (a cultivated plant not known in a wild form), etc. Running through all these terms is the idea of human effort and influence in the growth of something away from its natural or wild form. The object in every case is to improve, refine, customize, and so on. 'Culture,' then is the set of ideas and agencies used to change the wild behavior in people into the refined social qualities that are required to bring about a harmonious and stable, hence prosperous society. We can conclude correctly, that problems in society are caused by 'wild' behavioral patterns that have escaped the acculturation process for whatever reason."[20]

"If these negative images of Black people and institutions are to change, we need to redirect and refocus our time, energy, and educational resources to mitigate and eventually eliminate these untruths from the minds of our people. Probably the best to start is with our past. It has been said that those who forget there past are subject to relive it. If this is true, then the urgency of the moment and of our time and place in history presently requires, yea, demands all the opportunity we can muster to rewrite and begin to live the positive history that is ours... Africa is a continent of great diversity in physiographic features, peoples, cultures, traditions and ways of life. For too long we (American Blacks) have been fled on a diet of the Africa that was portrayed by the "Tarzan syndrome' of the Hollywood movie makers. Coupled with institutional and individual racism, we as a people too frequently saw 'through a glass darkly'."[21]

It is necessary for us to remove the dark shades from our eyes in order to truly see what a positive understanding of one's culture can create. "An inherent aspect of culture is that it represents the beliefs that people hold in common. There is something in the nature of people, in the early part of their spiritual growth that promotes the indiscriminate imitation of behavior and beliefs of the majority. In this way, culture has a way of endorsing

incorrect behavior. For example, beyond the fact that smoking is very harmful, it serves no beneficial purpose. People get into it merely from imitative behavior. We will see that the same can be found with the practice of 'falling in love', kissing, etc. The importance of this revelation is to be found in the ironic fact that the very same persons that are active in the forefront to find solutions to social problems, are unwittingly the staunchest defenders of the cultural elements that are at the root of the problems. If the essence of 'love', for example, is giving selflessly or sacrificing for others, how can it then be equated with something that you can 'fall into or out of?' Having spotted the discrepancy between 'selflessness' and self-interest that accompanies most cases of 'falling in love', are you now ready to give up this mode of behavior?"[22]

There is a great need for a cultural reformation within the African American community in order to bring about wholesome marriages. "Seeing that the main blame of the cause of marital problems must be laid on the errors in the culture, we must conclude that the solutions to these problems must be sought in the reformation of the culture. If, to give an example, 3% of the population comes down with an illness, you will look into the constitution, and lifestyle of the sick individuals. On the other hand, if 50% of the population comes down with the same illness, you

must then look, not at the individuals, but for some social, or environmental cause of the problem. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States for 1991, published by the United States Department of Commerce, the average duration of marriages in the United States from 1970 to 1987 was 7 years. The average age at divorce was early, to mid 30's. The average rate of marriages for 1980 to 1989 was 10 per 1000 population, while the divorce rate--not including most annulments, legal separations, and unofficial separations--was 5 per 1000 population (50% of the marriage rate). A horrendous epidemic indeed! It does not take a rocket scientist to see that we have a group problem on hand. The cause of the problem stem from beliefs and customs we hold in common. The laying of blame cannot continue to be made on an individual basis in the divorce court. The solution must be a group action. It is time to drag western culture into divorce court."[23]

The question then must become, "what do you marry now?" It is my contention that if African Americans would embrace some of the customs of Africa and some of its concepts concerning marriage and family we would be better abled and equipped to deal with the crisises in our marriages.

GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH ENRICHMENT TOUR

ROADMAP

FIRST STOP: Session 1

- Profile and Pre-Evaluation
- Program Purpose
- Lecture: African American Marriage-God's Style
- Covenant of Commitment Review
- Assignment: Daily Prayer Together.

SECOND STOP: Sessions 2 & 3

- Lecture: Discovering Your Backgrounds
- Exploring Ancient Africa's Family Code
- Assignment: Daily Prayer Together; Read, Genesis 2:21-25

THIRD STOP: Sessions 4 & 5

- Lecture: God's and Africa's Concept of Oneness or Unity
- Assignment: Daily Prayer Together; Read, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and Song of Songs (All).

FOURTH STOP: Sessions 6 & 7

- Lecture: Love and Intimacy/Romance
  What is this thing called love?
- Providing Basic Needs
- Assignment: Daily Prayer Together; Read
  1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 2 Timothy 2:3.

FIFTH STOP: Sessions 8 & 9

- Commitment
  "A Fulfilled Marriage takes a lifetime."
- Communication
- Assignment: Daily Prayer Together; Read, Ecclesiastes 9:4 and 2 Timothy 4:5 and Ephesians 6:10-20

SIXTH STOP: Session 10

- The Wrap Up
  Reflections
  Appointments/Referrals
- Post-Evaluation

Session I of the Project

A profile of fifty questions were given and a test battery of five questions were prepared and distributed to examine how married individuals viewed their marriages and the impact that the Christian African American Church has had on it. With the assistance of the armorbearers, we ask twenty married couples within our ministry to volunteer and respond to a confidential questionnaire and invited them to participate in a Marriage Enhancement Seminar. The Marriage Enrichment Seminar was schedule for ten weeks, two hours a week, to cover areas of conflict and concern. The armorbearers assisted me in this first Marriage Enhancement Seminar and was also exposed to information concerning the Africentric approach to marriage enhancement. I made it clear that Africentric thought in no way replaced or overrode Christianity, but only complimented it and offered new interpretations.

(Note: two hours also includes break time)

Questionnaire

1. Do you feel that the African American Church can help guide your marriage to success?
   _____ yes _____ no or _____ maybe

2. Do you feel that you can discuss your concerns with a qualified and Christian pastor or counselor?
   _____ yes _____ no or _____ not yet

3. Do you feel that marital enrichment sessions can be helpful to you?
_____ yes _____ no or _____ maybe

4. Do you feel that Africentric values, customs can enhance your marriage?
_____ yes _____ no or _____ not sure

5. Do you feel that a better understanding of self can enrich your marriage?
_____ yes _____ no

6. Do you think that your marriage can work, considering all the past mistakes?
_____ yes _____ no or _____ not sure

*** Pre-test evaluation. Each counselee was asked to fill this pre-test evaluation out.**

THIS IS A QUESTIONNAIRE PRODUCED BY REVEREND MELVIN O. MARRINER, PASTOR OF GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, 5910 WEST NORFOLK ROAD, PORTSMOUTH, VIRGINIA, AND A CANDIDATE FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE FROM UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

A SURVEY ON African American MARRIAGES

Mentors for Africentric Preaching and Pastoring are:

Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr., (Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ)
Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, (Consultant & President of African American Images)

Note: **When questionnaire is completed, please return to church office at Grove Baptist Church, 5910 W. Norfolk Road, Portsmouth, Virginia 23703**

Questionnaire

_____Male _____Female

1. How long have you been married?
___0-5 yrs ___6-10 yrs ____11-15 yrs ____16-more yrs

2. How old were you when you got married?
___16-19 ___20-25 ___26-30 ___31-40 ____40-up

3. Have you been married more than once? ___yes ___no

4. If you could do it again would you wait? ___yes ___no

5. Did you participate in any biblical pre-marital counseling?
___yes ___no **(If you answered yes to question 5, please respond to question 6-8)**

6. Has it been helpful in your marriage? ___yes ___no ___maybe

7. Did your pre-marital counseling cover areas of conflict that you have or are currently experiencing?
____yes ____no _____partially

8. Do you feel that the counselor adequately cover important issues to prepare you for marriage? ____yes ___no ___partially

9. Do you think that the church and the Christian faith can make a positive impact on your marriage? ____yes ____no

10. Do you think that you can confide in your pastor?
___yes ___no

11. What, if any has been your major frustration or complaint in your marriage? ___religious differences ____sex ___communication ___financial ____socially ____in-laws ___other

12. Have you or your spouse sought Christian counseling?
___yes ___no

13. Have you had an affair since you've been married?
____yes ___no

14. Do you think or know that your spouse has had or is having an affair? ___yes ___no

15. Do you feel that African American marriages have additional pressures compared to other marriages?
___yes ___no

16. Could you forgive your spouse for having an affair? ___yes ___no

17. Have you reached a point that you simply don't care? ____yes ____no

18. Have you thought about separation or divorce? ___yes ___no

19. Have there been any type of abuse in your marriage? ___yes ___no **(ex. physical, verbal, mental, drug, alcohol, etc.)**

20. Do you enjoy your spouse's company? ___yes ____no

21. Can you express yourself openly with your spouse? ___yes ____no ____at times

22. Do you find if difficult to apologize and forgive? ___yes ____no

23. Is your spouse your best friend? ____yes ____no

24. Do you discuss your spouse's faults with others? ___yes ___no

25. Do you and your spouse pray together? **(other than meal time)** ___yes ___no

26. Have you ever withheld sex from your spouse to prove a point? ____yes ____no

27. Have you ever pretended to be asleep when you thought your spouse wanted sex? ___yes ____no

28. Do you think that the Christian Bible deals with sex? ____yes ____no

29. Does your spouse make you feel good about yourself? ____yes ____no

30. Are you happy with your spouse's employment career? ___yes ___no

31. Are both persons working outside jobs? ___yes ___no

32. Are you happy and satisfied with your own? ___yes ____no

33. Are you satisfied with your spouse's personality? ___yes ___no

34. Are you physically attracted to your spouse? ___yes ___no

35. Does your family take yearly vacation time together? ___yes ___no

36. Does your spouse encourage you to develop your full potential? ___yes ____no

37. Does your spouse meet your;
    sexual needs? ____yes ____no
    emotional needs? _____yes _____no
    financial needs? _____yes _____no
    spiritual needs? _____yes _____no

38. Does your spouse compliment you? _____yes ____no **(ex. you look very nice.)**

39. Is your spouse easily influenced by family and or friends? ___yes ____no

40. Are you? ____yes _____no

41. Do you have problems with your in-laws? ___yes ____no

42. Does your spouse have problems with their in-laws? ___yes ___no

43. Do you attend church on a regular basis? ____yes _____no

44. Does your spouse? _____yes _____no

45. Does either of you attend other services sponsored by your local church? _____yes _____no

46. Are there children in the family? _____yes _____no
___1, ___2, ___3, ____4, ____more

47. Would you attend a marriage workshop? ____yes _____no

48. Would your spouse? ____yes _____no

49. Do you think that the African American Church has played a major role in the life of your family? ____yes _____no

50. Where would you turn first if you needed help in your marriage?

___friends ____family ____psychics _____affairs
____alcohol ____drugs ____church **(minister's Christian laity)** ____other

Program Activity for Marriage Enhancement

ACTIVITY: Africentric Marriage Seminar for Christians.

PURPOSE: To provide Christian married couples with spiritual and practical insights concerning issues and problems confronting them; and to share an Africentric model for marital enrichment; an to establish Scriptural guidelines, principles, and disciplines that can be followed and practiced.

WHERE: Grove Baptist Church Fellowship Hall

WHEN: Each Monday night for ten weeks 6:30-8:30 p.m.

FACILITATOR: Pastor
Director of Christian Education Ministry
Associate Ministers
Armorbearers

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Study Guide (provided)
Bibles
Pens and Note Pads (provided)
Others requested by Seminar Leaders

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Two Dining Engagements-at the end of the fourth and final sessions there will be an

economical dinner that provides an atmosphere of warmth and romance.

I. Lecture

African American Marriage-God's Style

As a pastor and minister of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, I have witnessed many attempts to achieve happiness in marriage apart from God. "Most couples symbolically include God in the wedding ceremony by using a preacher, having scriptures read, reciting God's name as part of the vows and having their wedding performed in the church. God is usually left standing at the altar, however, while the couples build their families without him."[23] Those who are Christian and come to the church for guidance in their marriage, interpreted from an Africentric perspective, rather than from a Eurocentric and secular one. Marriage God's style is far more effective than doing it man's way. Therefore, it is the minister's responsibility to correctly exegete the scriptures and then be able to present it in a fashion that people can understand and apply. If we as spiritual leaders do not make known God's purpose for marriage, we will see many more marriages limping to divorce court.

Successfully guiding marriages have to start with knowing what God's will or style consist of. A Christian ceremony and religious jargon does not constitute a Christian marriage. I believe marriage to be God's way for

use to attempt to understand the oneness of the Trinity (3 in 1), and at the same time experiencing joy with the one he has given to us. In other words, "it is a divine illustration that provides a model on earth of our marriage with Christ in heaven."[24] The Apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 5 that there is a parallel between husband and wife and that of Christ's relationship with the church. Husbands and wives share the same human essence as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in their spiritual essence. They are distinct persons, but one. Genesis 2:23, 24 states; "Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken. Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (New Revised Standard Version).

A Christian marriage is significant because it is an extension of the Church. The African American church offers to the African American Christian marriage an atmosphere where both husband and wife can deepen their understanding and appreciation for God and each other.

According to God, marriage is a covenant, rather than a contract. Malachi 2:14 says, "The Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you

have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant." A covenant is based upon personal relationship. In contracts, no personal relationship is required, only a legally binding agreement. A biblical covenant is a divinely established, legally binding relationship between two or more parties who consent to particular functions and guidelines directed by God. God's desire in marriage is that we be fruitful and multiply. This mandate is more than having babies. It means fulfilling life's expectancies by reaching our full spiritual, physical, mental and social potentials. It means empowering others to have the best that God offers and fulfilling their purpose in life.

Marriage is one of life's most serious steps and should not be entered into unadvisedly. Christ and prayer must be accepted as the most important ingredients in Christian marriage. If partners accept God as a unifying force, marriage can be beautiful and exciting inspite of what we hear and see from the media and friends. For most couples, marriage is only a small taste of what it could be. There appears to be much more dedication to friends, occupation, education, child-rearing or social causes. Sometimes people enter marriage with a wrong attitude. We easily think of the fun side of married life. There are also sickness, pain, suffering, and sorrow, and often these experiences in

marriage are lifelong. Then the reality of Christian love is tested, and love either blossoms or dies.

Ephesians 5:21-33 (NRSV)

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just at the Church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the Church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind-yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the Church, because we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

Covenant of Commitment

I _____ hereby covenant and renew my commitment to my God, my spouse and my church, on this _____ day of _____, 1994. I also covenant to be a active participant for my personal and family enrichment, in each session of the Grove Baptist Church Marriage Enrichment Experience. And I will forego discussion of anything I learn about my group mates with anyone outside of this group.

Signed by:

_____and_____

Session 2 Lecture

Discovering Your Backgrounds

Too many modern families have not learned the lessons of the past with respect to family unity. As a result, the divorce rate nationwide has risen to astronomical heights. How can we turn the divorce tide and profit from the lessons of the past? We need to extract those positive virtues from the past and incorporate them into our marriages. We need to learn, relearn and practice healthy habits that have been taught by Ptah Hotep, Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul and other contributors to Africentric Christian marriages.

We have seen that the Eurocentric and American concept has not worked for them or for African Americans. This is evident from the internal struggles of Prince Charles and Lady Diana and the average couple throughout America. We must understand that the enormous rate of divorce is not primarily caused by social-economic factors of wealth, because the rich and the poor are facing crisis within their marriages. The facade that Hollywood portrayed by shows such as the "The Brady Bunch", and "Father Knows Best", was an attempt to show others that "white" marriages and families were ideal. Now the true root of American thought has come out by shows such as "Married...With Children" and

"Roxanne" that definitely describe American culture as less than ideal. Maybe there is a need to investigate our own culture as African Americans, which date back thousands of years before slavery. The mere fact that Ghana has only a 5% divorce rate warrants consideration.

"Ghana's known history extends back as far as the 25th dynasty or the seventh century B.C., known as the "Land of Gold" because of the abundance of this precious metal, it also boasted sufficient resources in agricultural products such as cotton, wheat, millet, corn, yams, and cattle. In addition, there was mining, and a thriving iron industry, and many craftsmen, among them blacksmiths, goldsmiths, coppersmiths, stone masons, brick masons, water diviners, carpenters, weavers, sandalmakers, dyers, cabinet-makers, and potters.

The family was central to this flourishing commerce, both as a producer and beneficiary. Often entire families, extended families, lineages, and even whole villages would be involved with a particular trade. Each family member had a role to play. Trades helped bind families together."[25]

Seminar Outline:

A. Ancient Egyptians contribution to understanding marriage and the family.

1. Lover of his home and family.
2. Affectionate relations between parents and children.
3. Strong concept of the extended family
   sanguinity (blood ties)
   conjugality (marital ties)
   *Believed that it took a village to raise a family.
4. Strong family code consisting of the following elements:
   a. The role of the man, husband and father was paramount. He was the master of the house, breadwinner. (Further explanation in later session).
   b. The wife was in some respects more important. She bore the children and brought them up, providing for continuation of the family.
5. Marriage was highly sanctioned and regularly practiced. To find a family and establish a house was held to be the duty of every right-minded man.
   a. Most of the fine stone statutes of African kings showed them with their wives.

b. Even though polygamy was a common practice, strong emphasis was placed on love, honor and respect between husband and wife.

B. Ptah Hotep an Egyptian priest wrote 2500 years before Christ concerning man's attitude...for caring for his wife and family.

"If thou wouldst be wise [or prosperous] establish a house for thyself [get married]. Love thou thy wife in the house wholly and rightly. Fill her bell and clothe her back; oil for anointing is the medicine for her limbs. Make her heart to rejoice as long as thou livest; she is a field profitable to her lord. Enter not into disputes with her. She will withdraw herself before violence. Make her to prosper permanently in thy house."[26]

C. Elders were mentors for younger men and offered them wise advise on avoiding relationships or affairs with strange women.

Ptah Hotep says:

"If thou wishes to maintain a permanent friendship in the house to which thou art in the habit of going, whether as master, or whether as brother, or whether as friend, or in fact any place to which thou has the

entry, strive against associating with the women there. The place which they frequent is not good [for thee]; but the imprudent man follows them in their quest of what is beautiful. A man is made a fool of by dazzling limbs, which turn into things that are harder than quartzite sandstone. The pleasure lasts only for a brief moment, and it is even as a dream, and when it is ended a man finds death through having experienced it."[27]

Session 3

Ancient African Family Code According to Ptah Hotep

This great scribe, Ptah Hotep includes in his original instructions found in a cave some 2500 years before the Christian era the ten-point code pertaining to family life:"[28]

a. If God gives you children, don't impose on one who has no children. Neither should you decry or brag about having your own children, for there is many a father who has grief, and many a mother with children who is less than content than another...

b. If you are a wise man train up a son who will be pleasing to God. If he is straight and takes after you, take good care of him. Do everything that is good for him...Don't withdraw your heart from him. But an offspring can make trouble.

c. If your son betrays and neglects your counsel and disobeys all that is said, with his mouth spouting evil speech, then punish him for all his talk. God will hate him who crosses you. His guilt was determined in the womb. He who God makes boastless cannot cross the water.

d. If you want friendship to endure in the house that you enter, the house of a master, of a brother or a friend, then, in whatever place you enter beware of approaching the women there. Unhappy is the place where this is done.

e. If you want to have perfect conduct, to be free from every evil, then above all guard against the vice of greed. Greed is a grievous sickness that has no cure. There is no treatment for it. It embroils fathers, mothers, and the brothers of the mother. It parts the wife from the husband. Greed is a compound of all the evils.

f. Do not be greedy in the division of things. Do not covet more than your share. Don't be greedy toward your relatives...Poor is the person who forgets his relatives. He is deprived of their company. Even a little bit of what is wanted will turn quarreler into a friendly person.

g. Be circumspect in matters of sexual relations.

h. If you take for a wife a good-time who is joyous and who is well known in the town, if she is fickle and seems to live for the moment, do not reject her. Let her eat. The joyful person brings happiness.

i. Useful is hearing to a son who hears... How good it is for a son to understand his father's words. The son will reach old age through those words.

j. Every man teaches as he acts. He will speak to his children so that they will speak to their children. He will set an example and not give offense. So if justice stands firm, your children will live. As to the first child who gets into trouble, when people see it, they will say about the child "that is just like him" and they will also say when they even hear a rumor about the child "that is just like him too."

God and Africa's Concept of Oneness or Unity

Session 4
(A). Lecture

What exactly does oneness mean? Does it mean that one must deny themselves for the other person? And, if so, is this concept of oneness really practical? These are but a few questions that counselees have asked in counseling sessions, as they try to understand and wrestle with the institution that God has ordained. God has ordained two institutions that are mandated to express his genuine love for self and others. The first institution that God ordained was marriage. When God had completed his first stage of creation out of total chaos, he took an immediate inventory and analysis and determined that all that he had created was good, until he got to man. The Lord said, in what we call Genesis 2:18, "it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." What God was actually saying was that man was alright but not fulfilled. Man was not and is not totally complete or fulfilled without his helper; the woman. And, not merely from a sexual or domestic point of view. Therefore, God completed man in Genesis 2:19-25.

> Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the

> air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Today's English Version).

In gospel according to Matthew, Jesus addresses the institution of marriage and commitment by saying:

> So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness and marries another woman commits adultery." The disciplines said to him," If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry. Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given." (Matthew 19:3-11 TEV).

The second institution that God ordained was the church or the "called out body of believers". It is God's desire for the Christian church to express his love and forgiveness to a sinful generation. The church is that institution that should authentically and daily live the "will" of the Lord. Listen to what Jesus says about the church.

> When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Phillippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still

> others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:13-18, Today's English Version).

Remember that the Lord said in Genesis 2, concerning man and woman that "two shall become one". As we compare that text with 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 text, we find a common tread were many are called to become one.

> The body is a unit, through it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (TEV)

What God is stating through the Apostle Paul is that the body (church) and marriage is a unit composed of different parts or personalities that forms one entity. Life is not complete without the significant other. Be very

mindful that the other is always, irregardless of any circumstances a significant other. Without the significant other, we would miss out on the beauty of diversity and intimacy.

What then does oneness mean? First, let us define what oneness is not, to fully understand what it is. Oneness can never be achieved when part of the unit is compelled into being or becoming less than God's original intent. Oneness does not mean: a. self-neglect

b. surrender of identity

c. manipulation

d. hierarchy

or, e. that it will always equate to 50-50.

These things cause division rather than oneness or unity. God made man and woman to complement each other, rather than one being considered to be superior or inferior to the other. Marriage deals with human relationships. The blending of the lives of two individuals is the most intimate of all relationships. Marriage is the blending of lives of individuals socially, mentally, spiritually and physically. Christianity and Africentricity maintains the kind of relationship that emphasizes their dignity as persons. Oneness encompasses the sharing of each other in all aspects of life. In essence, oneness is homocentric,

which means having a common center. Husbands and wives are not homogeneous, but should if the marriage is to be successful have a common center. What this means is that couples may not agree on everything or have the same likes but more importantly have the same desired goals or outcomes. Oneness is not compromised when persons disagree, but rather when the original intent or desired goals are altered by the disagreement. As the Apostle Paul writes to the saints at Ephesus, in Ephesians 5:21, he declares that all parts submit to each other without compromise of its individual functions, that offers assistance to the other parts that they to may function properly.

Session 5

As we divorce the Eurocentric approach to marriage, let us briefly consider how African's viewed their marriage and family structure. "From the work of black scholars we learn that each aspect in the lives of West Africans was permeated with the African belief in strong kinship bonds. The notion of rugged individualism dominated European economic philosophy. However, the West African tribes shared in the area of kinship an intra-tribal sense of collective unity and adopted the philosophy 'we are; therefore, I am.' Consequently, an individual was nobody because the self was defined in relationship to others."[29] The most distinctive qualities of African values and principles is that they are

communal rather than individualistic. In essence, they complemented each other.

In the generic sense "man" has but one body that is composed of various parts and organs. And, the only way generally speaking that man is superior over a woman is "brute physical force." "Since force can cause wrong to prevail over right, thus the need to replace it as the warden of law and order with morality and spirituality."[30] Africans have always been a spiritual people, because it distinguished humanity from the lower animal kingdom. The only way to achieve and understand oneness had to come through the spiritual realm.

"An important aspect of African philosophy is the belief from empirical evidence that man's life precedes and survives beyond the existence of his physical body, which is merely the tool that allows man's experience in the physical realm. Man, from the African perspective, is essentially a spiritual being. This is to say, that his behavior originates in his spirit, and that all of the organs that can be shown to be tied into his behavior are not the cause of such behaviors, but like radios that receive transmissions from another source, these organs receive and transmit the behavioral impulses that originate in the spirit. In other words, if there are animalistic structure

in the brain, they are there to transmit the animalistic influences from a certain portion of the spirit, and so on."[31]

Like the human brain that is one structure that is composed of several divisions, so is the spirit. In the Kamitic, Davidian, Canaanite traditions, seven major divisions of the spirit were recognized. The first being the highest and the seventh being the lowest. Let us now view them in order.

The Divisions of the Spirit

1st - Ba.	Ability to unite all interests in society, as this part of the spirit is beyond all likes and dislikes. It is the Universal spirit, the World spirit. All creatures are integral parts of this body. We experience this oneness in the same manner that we experience the billions of cells making up our physical body as one body. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Ausar, and the 1st sphere of the Tree of Life.
2nd - Khu.	Ability to intuit perfect solutions to all problems. Can intuit the Truth of a logical premise. It is the oracular faculty of prophets. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity of wisdom, Tehuti, and the 2nd sphere of the Tree of Life.
3rd - Shekem.	Ability to affect nature and the course of events through the use of spiritual power (specifically, through the use of the power of sound-hekau, mantras). It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Seker, and the 3rd sphere of the Tree of Life.

4th - Ab.

a) Ability to synthesize (think cosmologically): the ability to see the abstract unity and interdependence between all things. Can establish the Truth of a logical premise. The ability to lone, depends on the elevation of consciousness to this part of the spirit. The synthesizing function of the AB corresponds to the Kamitic deity Maat, and the 4th sphere of the Tree of Life.
b) Ability to analyze (able to see the abstract difference between things. Justice depends on the elevation of consciousness to this part of the spirit. It corresponds to the Kamitian deity HeruKhuti, and the 5th sphere of the Tree of Life.
c) Ability to think circumspectively. Able to coordinate the activity of all the faculties of the spirit. This is reasoning. It establishes the will, and enables it to carry out its function which is to control the lower animal impulses, so that the higher parts of the spirit can guide our behavior. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Heru, and the 6th sphere of the Tree of Life.

5th - Sahu

a) Imagination and congregative thinking. Able to coordinate external into harmonious patterns to appeal to the emotions (aesthetics). In the state of trance, the imagination can be used to control and effect changes in the body and emotions. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Het-Herv (Nebt-Het), and the 7th sphere of the Tree of Life.
b) Syllogistic logical, and segregative thinking. Able to separate parts of a whole (usually mistaken for analysis), to focus on isolated parts. It works through definition and names. It is the master source of delusions and troubles in people's lives. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Sebek (captured and used for his own perverted agenda, by Set), and the 8th sphere of the Tree of Life.
c) Memory and imitative (learning) faculty. It is the faculty of trance induction. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Auset, and the 9th sphere of the Tree of Life.

6th - Khaibit	The animal soul. It is the source of emotions, sense perception, sensual phenomena (desires, pleasure, virtuability, pain, etc.), physical movement. It is the motor of our being. It corresponds to the Kamitic deities Nekhebet and Vatchet and the 10th sphere of the Tree of Life.
7th - Khab	This is our physical body which gives us the illusion that we are separate beings, and that reality is broken into a time and space continuum. It corresponds to the Kamitic deity Geb, and the 10th sphere of the Tree of Life.

In conclusion, "there is an evolutionary perspective of the diversions of the spirit. The majority of people have already evolved the three lower divisions of the spirit (the physical body or Khab, the animal soul or Khaibit, and the lower intellect or Sahu) and 1/3 of the 4th division (the higher intellect or Ab) of the spirit. It seems that while nature will evolve man up to the lower third of the spirit, the rest is up to his own efforts of spiritual cultivation (culture)."[32] Fully understanding the essence that oneness is an evolutionary process that must be operated by the highest level in the divisions of spirit. The Apostle Paul says it like this, "when I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became an adult, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11).

(B). Class Discussion

Further explanation of Genesis 2:24 concerning oneness. Therefore, shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.

(1) Leaving parents through marriage means that we:

a. Establish an adult relationship with them.

b. We are more concerned about our mates ideas, opinions, and practices than theirs.

c. Do not depend on our parents for affection, approval, assistance, and counsel.

d. Eliminate bad attitudes toward our parents to prevent ongoing emotional ties.

e. Must stop trying to change our mate because of our parents' desires.

f. Make the husband/wife relationship our priority human relationship.

(2) Cleaving to one another through marriage means that we:

a. Vow to be faithful to one another until death.

b. Understand marriage to be a deliberate choice.

c. See it as a matter of obedience not convenience.

d. Be willing and determined to work at the relationship.

e. Base it on commitment, not feelings.

f. See it as an irrevocable covenant or contract which is binding.

g. Are faithful regardless of what happens to either spouse.

h. Make the same type of commitment to one another as in our relationship with Christ. (bride/bridegroom)

i. Be joined to one another in sickness and health, poverty and wealth, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, good times and bad times, agreements and disagreements.

j. Mutually face problems, discuss them, seek God's help in them, and resolve them because there is no way out. You are committed to one another for life.

(3) One flesh through marriage means that we:

a. Have a physical union (sexual) within the bounds of marriage and that it is holy, good, and beautiful.

b. Practice total giving to and sharing with another person until death do us part.

c. Achieve total intimacy and a deep unity.

d. Are sharing everything: bodies, possessions, insights, ideas, abilities, problems, successes, sufferings, failures, etc.

e. Are being as concerned about the other person's needs as we are about our own.

f. Do not let differences hinder our unity.

(4) God's Arithmetic for oneness versus the World view. God's view 1 + 1 = 1. God's view of marriage is quite different than of the World. God's view is that each individual brings to the relationship the potential of being whole. It is not based upon superiority or a hierarchial system. Notice that God's arithmetic is quite different than the world's arithmetic.

Worlds's view - 1 + 0 = 1 or 1/2 + 1/2 = 1. God is not requiring anyone to be or better a zero by self denial or by any other means. Nor does God's plan for marriage require or desire one or both individuals to be half developed or matured. If one person in the marriage considers themselves or is considered a zero for any reason, then Dr. John Kinney, Dean of Virginia Union University's School of Theology, says "that there will be some 'one' else on the outside" which complicates the whole matter. Many people say, "My spouse and I are so different," as if that's a major problem.

But what do we expect. If both partners were the same, one would be unnecessary. The whole point of being different is that each person has what the other doesn't have, desperately needs and can't progress without. But, when a person stops being the one that God desires, then their marriage is in trouble. Why are there a lot of unhappy marriages and families? Because there are a lot of unhappy people in them, people who are not walking close to the Lord and are not building self. When self is not steadfastly built upon then the oneness of God through marriage is hindered. 1 + 1 = 1 is our attempt to be obedient to God to build the best self to offer to the other to complete each other.

(C). Presentation of Maulana Karenga's Nguzo Saba

Through reading and understanding the seven principles call The Nguzo Saba, I believe that it promotes oneness for marriages, families and the community at large. One factor that prohibits and destroys oneness is lack of values or principles. Maulana Karenga, the founder of the African American holiday known as Kwanzaa, tells of the influence of the ancient Africans upon the origin of this celebration. Kwanzaa starts December 26 and lasts for seven days. It is an essential tool for guiding marriages to reach its fullest

potential. It offers a wonderful sense of high performance and achievement standards.

Dr. Karenga lists five basic functions of the Nguzo Saba, and they are:

"1. Organize and enrich our relations with each other on the personal and community level;

2. Establish standards, commitments and priorities that would tend to enhance our human possibilities as persons and a people;

3. Aid in the recovery and reconstruction of lost historical memory and cultural legacy in the development of an Africentric paradigm of life and achievement;

4. Serve as a contribution to a core system of communitarian ethical values for the moral guidance and instruction of the community, especially the children; and

5. Contribute to an ongoing and expanding set of Afrocentric communitarian values which would aid in bringing into a new man, woman and child who self-consciously participate in the ethical project of starting a new history of African people and humankind."[33]

After the purposes have been introduced and understood, I then presented Maulana Karenga's Nguzo Saba. If one does

not understand the purpose for something, they will eventually abuse it and it would become something that takes up space. If we can appreciate the purpose and understand the functions then we can better fulfill the principles.

"NGUZO SABA"[34]

(The Seven Principles)

1. UMOJA (Unity)

   To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, national and race.

2. KUJICHAGULIA (Self-determination)

   To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for an spoken for by others.

3. UJIMA (Collective Work and Responsibility)

   To build and maintain our community together and sister's and brother's problems, our problems and solve them together.

4. UJAMAA (Cooperative Economics)

   To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.

5. NIA (Purpose)

   To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

6. KUUMBA (Creativity)

   To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

7. IMANI (Faith)

   To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Each day of Kwanzaa is devoted to a specific principle. Each principle calls forth deeper social, spiritual and moral commitment. These seven principles provide the philosophical foundation of Kwanzaa. These are but words until people begin to live them. Likewise, marriage enrichment must be a daily devotion focusing on specific principles of oneness. Each day offers the opportunity for deeper social, spiritual, moral and marital commitment. In addition, Kwanzaa offers a sample of what can be gained by a systematic plan to reach a desired goal. Marriages also must have a systematic plan to reach the desired goal of happiness and fulfillment.

The Community Interprets Kwanzaa[35]

UMOJA (oo-MOE-jah) UNITY

We can work together and play together. We must work with the people in our family and in our school and in the community of African American people.

KUJICHAGULIA (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah) SELF-DETERMINATION

It seems hard to say; but I try and try to learn it, and learn that it's about making up my mind to 'keep on keeping on' in everything I do.

UJIMA (oo-JEE-man) COLLECTIVE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY

Shared work is team work. You help me and I help you...If you have a problem, you can lean on me...When I have a problem, you are able to help me.

UJAMAA (oo-JAH-mah) COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS

One person alone may not have a lot; but when each person puts in her share of work, wealth, and willpower, everybody has more.

NIA (nee-AH) PURPOSE

I want a good home, and a good school, and a good community. I will make a plan every day so I will know what to do to make the good things happen.

KUUMBA (koo-OOM-bah) CREATIVITY

I create plans for a good home and a good school and a good community...I can create beautiful things, and I will, because inside I am a beautiful person.

IMANI (ee-MAH-nee) FAITH

I believe that sharing together is good. I believe that making up my own mind and sticking to it is good too...I believe that planning and doing the right thing is good. All these things help make me beautiful inside. I believe they will help me see the beautiful old people and the little babies that will come in the future.

Session 6
Love and Intimacy/Romance

(A). Lecture

Love is God's idea, and it is the most fundamental foundation for a "good" marriage. Many of our marriages have been built on the foundation of feelings rather than on a decision to love. Marriage is a complex relationship, perhaps the most intricate on the face of the earth, and it is made more complex when individuals marry without the proper understanding of love. There are not short cuts when it comes to building a healthy, loving and caring relationship. It requires time, tears, hard work, planning and sacrifice. Many people think that the dynamics of a good marriage depend on some mysterious blend of the "right" people. Or if a marriage turns out badly, we call the two people "wrong" for each other. More frequently with marital breakups one or both partners lack the skills or awareness to meet each other's needs. If marriages are not built upon

with a proper understanding of love and its implications, then those particular marriages are built upon a weak foundation. And, anything that is built on a weak foundation will come crashing down sooner or later and many beautiful-looking homes will simply become a place of habitation or a boarding house. A home is something you build that goes beyond brick, mortar and furniture. It is a decision based upon love to build a strong family unit.

Luther Vandross, a famous 80's and 90's African American love ballot singer sang a song called A House is not a Home.

> "A chair is still a chair even when there is no one sitting there, but a chair is not a house and a house is not a home when there's no one there to hold you tight and no one there you can kiss good night. A room is still a room even when there's nothing there but gloom, but a room is not a house and a house is not a home when the two of us are far apart and one of us has a broken heart. Now and then I call your name and suddenly your face appears, but it's just a crazy game when it ends in tears. Pretty little darling have a heart, don't let one mistake keep us apart. I'm not meant to live alone, turn this house into a home and when I climb the stairs and turn the key please be there and say you'll still be in love with me. I'm not meant to live alone, turn this house into a home. When I climb the stairs and turn the key, please be there, still in love, I said still in love with me. Are you going to be in love with me? I want and need you to still be in love with me. Say you're gonna be in love with me, it's driving me crazy to think that my baby wouldn't be in love with me. Say that you're gonna be still in love with me."[36]

Luther Vandross clearly defines the plight of many Americans and African Americans. African Americans possess much more material possessions while many of our marriages are "poverty stricken". It is unfortunate that many marriages "were built on the world's pathetic definition of love, which is nothing more than a temporary feeling at best and a euphemism for sex without commitment at worst (witness the TV soap operas both daytime and evening)."[37] The use of the word "love" has become so loosely used that it has been, by many reduced down to a sexual act and a "catch all" word. To have sex is "to make love" in America's way of thinking. This is why many people have been victimized by the culturally admissible occurrence of leaving one's relationship because they are looking for love in all the wrong places. African Americans have assimilated to the western culture which operates out of the lower brain when it comes to male-female relationships. I have counseled many people who inform me that the "chemistry is gone" or the "thrill is gone." These statements clearly informs me that they originally used the wrong ingredients. Therefore, our task now is to rebuild the African American family from a Christocentric perspective, interpreted from our African souls. We have to build marriages from the ground up, start from the foundation so we can have a strong sense of home and not just a beautiful house. We in America have built a lot of beautiful and great houses, but very few homes. A

house is not a home unless love is its foundation or support.

"To love, is to do something for someone, seeking nothing in return. Such selflessness can go to the ultimate sacrifice--the giving one one's like for another. Clear thinking will show that such behavior, although expressed most often in family and conjugal relationship is not an essential requirement, nor is it special to such relationships. We see acts of selflessness expressed between friends, from people for their nation, or group, or the less capable, etc. Such concepts as 'conjugal love,' 'brotherly and sisterly love,' 'maternal and paternal love,' as expressions of 'types of love' betray a lack of understanding growing out of Sahu (lower intellect) generated thinking. It reveals the inability to abstract selflessness out of the concrete examples of loving behavior. Selfless behavior is the doing for others without thought to what we can get in return. If we do 'it' because we are seeking pleasure--sexual thrills, emotional upliftment--in return, then it is selfish. In other words, not love. If my doing 'it' demands something in return, as when I kiss you, caress you, etc., it is not love. i.e., selfless behavior. Don't get me wrong. Our model for a good relationship has a place for sensual and affectionate exchanges since no one should be expected to have to

suppress these natural reflexes. But the problem originates in the western misunderstanding and misclassification of sensual and emotional behavior as expressions of love."[38] These words come from Ra Un Nefer Amen and are somewhat comparable with God's concept of love recorded in 1 Corinthians 13. The Bible offers the most profound description of the type of love that can make a marriage a happy one:

> Love is able to suffer.
> Love is kind.
> Love envieth not.
> Love vaunteth not itself.
> Love is not puffed up.
> Love behaves itself.
> Love seeketh not her own.
> Love is not easily provoked.
> Love thinketh no evil.
> Love rejoiceth in the Truth.
> Love beareth all things.
> Love believeth all things.
> Love hopeth all things.
> Love endureth all things.
> Love never faileth.
> Love is a fruit of the Spirit.

Love is a decision that offers itself simply because of its nature. Sex can be and is a strong expression of love, but love is an expression in and of itself. Dr. M. Scott Peck defined love in his book The Road Less Traveled as: "The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."[39] In other words, love requires effort and it is not genuine unless it extends itself as itself. The will to extend yourself simply

because it is right is very hard work. Our egos are strong and often misleading, would rather not make the hard choice of going out of our way for the sake of our marriage. Many feel that it is much easier to have an affair than struggling to work and enhance our marriages. I tell my congregation that "grass is not always greener on the other side for it could be artificial turf and artificial turf is a lot harder when one falls."

One of the main problems in our love relationship with others is our failure to understand what Jesus meant when he said "Love thy neighbor as thyself." It is tragic to attempt to love others without loving and respecting self first. A person who feels unloved for any reason cannot love others. And the way one generally feels about self is the way they will generally extend love. Again, let us examine God's equation of 1 + 1 = 1. What God is saying by this equation as it relates to love, is that if both individuals have a proper understanding of self-love, then that will equal (1) productive relationship. Love is not limited to 50-50, but must be willing to offer 100% or all of (1)'s self to achieve the ultimate experience in love. Love produces life. Asher Ludwidge, an African American poet wrote in his book The Black Family Towards More Self-Love, this poem entitled "Knowing That You Love Me".

Knowing That You Love Me

Knowing that you love me
Lights my dark despair.
Every hug you give me
Brings music to my ear.

Knowing that you love me
Sets my joy to dance,
I can feel self-assurance
When I am waiting for your romance.

Knowing that you love me
Helps me break the ice.
I can face the long day's journey
And not be afraid to roll the dice.[40]

(B). Workshop

A Biblical Romance

Snap the radio on, zip to any station, and what are you likely to hear? Some type of love songs. Songs of new love, song of broken hearts, songs of grateful love, songs of blind or crazy love. Times change, but through history the flow of love songs is a constant. The Bible deals with love, romance and sex from a positive perspective. In Genesis 2:25 it states that both Adam and Eve "were naked and not ashamed." Their God given desires for each other was beautiful, fulfilling and not "cheap lust." It was not cheaper until sin entered the world and man walked in total darkness.

***Note: At this point, the class was led into dialogue through the Song of Songs. These two lovers related their poetic imagery to the times in which they lived. Their romance was not just restricted to what grandmother called "courting", but transcended into their marriage.**

An Intoxicating Love - these lovers:

1. loved to look at each other
2. loved to communicate
3. were openly erotic
4. had no shame or guilt
5. acted as equals
6. were physical expressive
7. lives had a great sense of maturity and balance
8. know how to fulfill each other

Examples of Romantic Statements and Places

Songs of Songs 1:9-11, 15 (Today's English Version)

Man's Rap Line" in 1000 B.C.

You my love, excite men as a mare excites the stallions of Pharaoh's chariots. Your hair is beautiful upon your cheeks and fall along your neck like jewels. But we will make for you a chain of gold with ornaments of silver...How beautiful you are, my love; how your eyes shine with love!

Woman's "Rap Line" in 1000 B.C.

Song of Songs 1:12-14, 16

My king was lying on his couch and my perfume filled the air with fragrance. My lover has the scent of myrrh as he lies upon breaths. My lover is like the wild flowers that bloom in the vineyard at Engedi...How handsome you are, my dearest; how you delight me! The green grass will be our bed.

Role of Sex in Marriage

Sex in marriage is to be godly and fulfilling. Sex is an expression of love that God ordained for married people. It is to be so overwhelming that one does not desire to experience it with any other person than the one they are married to. Sex in our western society has become filthy, dirty and loveless. There is no other natural feeling on earth that is shared between man and woman that can be

compared to that of a sexual climax. No natural feeling is comparable!!! The only other experience that surpasses that awesome feeling is our spiritual relationship with the Divine through Jesus Christ.

Sex is more than physical, but it also involves the mind and the spirit. Therefore, it is called "making love" and the art of "making love" is never real unless both persons are mentally, physically and spiritually in tune to each other. If sex is an expression of love, and love is commitment, then sex or should I say "making love" should also have a strong sense of commitment and fulfillment.

Hebrews 13:4 (KJV)

> Marriage is honourable in all and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

1 Corinthians 7:5 (TEV)

> Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control.

Sex should not be abusive, dirty, used as a weapon, but beautiful and seen as God's desire for man and woman to experience a very powerful act. Love, Romance and Marriage Enhancement can be achieved by understanding the Basic Needs of your Spouse.

Session 7
Ranking Your Needs

Each person in the control group or counselee was asked to rank their personal needs from 1 to 10. Below I have listed the ten basic marital needs and have left space for additional input. Put a 1 before the most important need, a 2 before the next important need, and so on, until you have ranked them all. The needs you rate between 1 and 5 are those on which you want your spouse to focus greatest effort.

_____ Affection

_____ Sexual relations

_____ Conversation

_____ Recreational companionship

_____ Financial support

_____ Attractiveness of spouse

_____ Honesty and openness

_____ Domestic support

_____ Family commitment

_____ Admiration

_____ Other _____

_____ Other _____

After completion of this form, the spouses exchanged sheets and dialogue about their responses.

(C). Afrocentric Love

"No Afrocentric person can ever have merely a consciousness of oppression, pain, and suffering. The present and future must be projected as victory, indeed the present must be lived victoriously...Consciousness of victory is the awareness that all attitudes and behaviors are achievable...Relationships which are based on Afrocentric vision are never boring, dull, or without vitality. A visionary aspect to a relationship establishes a purpose outside of and beyond the daily considerations of living. The man and woman who dream together constitute the most advanced unit of an Afrocentric society."[41]

Afrocentric love is;

1. never abusive or demeaning
2. not sexist
3. not classist
4. not racist
5. not failure
6. VICTORIOUS

Victory means that you have won, not that you are expecting to win because faith and action are at work. Grandmother said it like this, "you can shout before the battle is over." Marriage must be seen as a challenge but one of victory. If this approach is taken, they would see a great change in how people would handle their conflicts that often lead to divorce. Victorious love is a relationship of

joy, of power, of peace, of overcoming creative thinking that keeps the "fire" from going out. Afrocentric love says "we can do it, even against all odds." Afrocentric love bypasses expressions like "we can't," "you ought not," "it is impossible," and "we're not equipped to," and finds a way to achieve it. Love is victory and the only way to find out is to keep on enduring with the positive attitude of a winner. Afrocentric love is an "expression of the 4th division of the spirit (the Ab), which expresses itself through the 'higher' functions of the cerebral cortex."[42]

At this stage of the project, I wanted to involve the associate ministers at Grove Baptist Church in the sessions by allowing them to facilitate one or more of the sessions, or deliver a sermon on marriage. Reverend L. Lorenzo Akins preached a sermon entitled The Binding Cord.

Sermon

Text: Matthew 22:34-40
Title: The Binding Cord

The Binding Cord

Matthew 22:34-40

As we look throughout the communities of this vast country, we see people acting or reacting in ways that are depressing and discouraging. We see murder at it's highest, we see drug and alcohol abuse ripping through the core of existence in our communities, we see husbands against wives, and wives against husbands. We see children turning on parents in acts of violence and even some children asking to be divorced from their parents. We see parents turning against their children in acts of racism and oppression began to once again excel. And most of all, we are witnessing church against church, and church members against church members. My theory on these acts that are so prevalent in our backyards today is that they are exemplary of the negative way we relate to each other. There is no sense of altruism in which we relate to our fellow brothers

and sisters. And this lack of regard for, and devotion to the interest of others is more luminous in the African American communities. We have substituted man's ideology of relationships for God's theology of relationships. The bible tells us in Phil. 2:4, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. In essence, this verse is saying that we should not be concerned only with self glory, but we should also be concerned about the glorification, and edification of others. In other words, before a brother sells crack cocaine to another brother, he should be concerned about what effect that drug might have on that brother and the people that brother might encounter; before a husband and father goes out and spends all of his money on alcohol, he should be concerned about the lost to this family and the effect the abuse of alcohol will have on his wife and children; before a young sister goes out and has sex outside the confines of marriage, she should be concerned about the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and/or the birth of a child who may be neglected; and before a young brother picks up a gun and kills another, he should be concerned about the fact that, "this is my brother and he faces the same struggles in life that I do"... This society conforms us to believe that self-glorification is of uttermost importance, it conforms us to presume supreme power over others, economic status, that prestigious position that houses on

Rowdale Drive, that Mercedes Benz and Lexus, regardless of who we have to step on or over, but I come by to tell you church, be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds... It's time that we as African American people and as a country, but more importantly as God's people, concentrate on establishing positive relationships. Positive relationships in our families, our communities, and in our work places. Positive relationships in and among our churches, and on the street corner. Positive relationships inter-racially and multi-racially. William Wilson, one of the most noted socialist in this country, states that the problem with socialism in this country, in large, is racial inequality.... Most of all, church, we should seek to establish a positive and continuous relationship with God. The word tells us seek ye first the kingdom of God.... Relationships should be built upon the foundation of love and love is defined not by Webster, or what someone can buy you, or how good someone can make you feel. Love is defined by God, through Jesus Christ, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life... God so loved, that he gave his best, he gave of himself, not because of anything the world had done, but God so <u>Loved</u> that he gave his only baby boy so that a broken relationship might be re-established. That's what love and relationship is all

about, Love is self-sacrificing and serves others rather than pleases self. And this type of love is not just restricted and confined to husband and wife and the extended family, but this type of love is inclusive of how we relate to all of God's creation... Love is the binding cord of Relationships... This type of love is incarnated in Jesus Christ and Jesus explains this love in our text to this lawyer, Pharisee friend, who had come to tempt him by asking the rhetorical question; which is the great commandment in the law? You see, the Pharisees had divided the ten commandments into 613 commandments. 248 affirmative ones to correspond with the members of the body, and 365 negative ones to correspond with the days of the year. They felt like some were small and could be neglected with impunity, and some were great and had such exceeding dignity that fulfillment of them would condone imperfect obedience in the case of others. They had taught that if a man rightly selected some great commandment to observe, he might safely disregard the rest. It did matter that the bible says, whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all. The commandments were set forth as a guideline as to how we should relate spiritually and morally, and these guys had twisted the word of God to suit their own needs. That's where we find today's society. This society has added to and taken away from the word of God to conform to the way that man says we

should relate to each other. That's why the divorce rate is so high, that's why people are killing each other, having not sense of philanthropy. That's why church members are fighting church members, pastors encountering deacons, and denominations cursing other denominations. That's why we have our young brothers and sisters turning to sex, drugs, and violence, instead of turning to Christ, the prince of peace.... Brother lawyer had come to ask Jesus to pick a great commandment, but Jesus comes with two commandments that are inclusive of all commandments, and at the same time tears down the negative perspective of relating, "Thou shalt not"; and sets forth that which is positive, "Thou shalt." First of all, he says Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This expression means that God is to be loved with all our powers and faculties, and nothing is to be preferred to him. The heart being the center of our being, the soul being the seat of the affections and desires, and the mind being the home of thought and reason. You see, in order to have successful and productive relationships, we need to put God in and relationships with God far most at the head of our lives. When you love God first, you have no other choice but to love all of his creation. Peter says that those who love him rejoice in him with joy -- unspeakable joy and are full of glory... The love of God adds stability to our lives, and gives us a solid foundation upon which we can

build relationships on. The love of God gives us priority to know that we need Christ in our lives instead of a weave on our heads or gold around our necks. The love of God protects us, because we would have that person who says he loves us declare, "until death do us part," before we part the sheets of a bed together. The love of God gives us power to say no to drugs and yes to Jesus... It gives us "staying power," power to stay in our marriages and work things out when times get hard...It gives us "hanging power," power to hand with the crew that has a positive purpose in life rather than those that condone violence. And it gives us "praying power," power to pray for my fellow man; power to pray for life's situations; power to pray that God would send a mate that has the same values, morality, and spiritually; and power to pray that God would have his way in our lives; power to have as Dr. M.L. King says, "Strength to Love," because Love is the binding cord of relationships.....Jesus says to the Pharisee that this is the first and great commandment and he couldn't repudiate it, because the Pharisees wore it around their necks and studied it daily in their amulets. But, they did apply it to their everyday lives. And I tell you church, we could carry our bibles everywhere we go; we could read and study it every minute of the day; but, if we don't apply it to our lives in everything that we do, it doesn't mean anything... In verse 39, Jesus puts this concept of love in a practical

sense. He shows how the one command involves and leads to the other. Jesus says, and the second is like unto the first commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." You see, the love of God establishes respect and dignity and love for oneself, enabling those characteristics to be expressed openly in a relationship. How can we carry on a viable and successful relationship, if we don't love ourselves? This society with it's provincial perspective on relationships, is systematically destroying the loving way we once adhered to each other. As a result, all throughout our communities across this country, we are showing the lack of love for ourselves, and therefore the lack of love for our neighbors. Love produces Love. John says we can't love God, if we don't love our brothers; Solomon says love coveth all sin; Jeremiah says love with an everlasting love; Paul says put on the breastplate of faith and love; owe no man anything, but to love one another; love works no ill to his neighbor, let brotherly love continue; love your enemy; walk in love as Christ also walked in love; all things work together for the good to them that love God. Jesus said that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, he also said if you love me, keep my commandments. Greater love... Greater love has not man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend... OH-how I love Jesus; OH-how I love Jesus, because he first loved me, OH- how I love Jesus, because one day, while we were yet sinners, one

day on an old rugged cross on calvary's mountain, Jesus showed his love for me and for you, OH- how I love Jesus, because he shed his precious blood, that we might have life and life more abundantly, OH how I-love-Jesus, because-he-first-loved-me... Love is the binding "cord" of relationships, love is the binding "cord" of relationships. And I say cord because a cord is much stronger than thread. A cord can be bent, and twisted, but not broken. A cord is a moral, spiritual, and emotional bond. A cord consists of two bonds of wire working together for the same cause, the two bonds of wire represent two individuals and all that they bring into a relationship, let's love, these bonds of wire are rapped and joined together by a tough and durable coating, let the blood of Jesus, these wires have a powerful current of energy flowing through them, let's the holy spirit, and this cord, is plugged into a source of power, the Heavenly Father. Love is, the binding cord, of relationship...

Session 8
Commitment and Communication

(A) Lecture

I have come to understand in my ministry and countless hours of counseling that commitment and communication go hand in hand. Commitment is never real unless it is communicated to the one we are involved with. I define commitment "as the verbal or physical exchange of feelings, attitudes, facts, beliefs, and ideas between persons."

If one does not commit to communicate about every aspect of married life, then the marriage is headed for doom. We also must communicate to understand and meet our spouse's needs to lay a foundation for lifelong happiness. Communication has limited influence when one does not desire to be committed to making the marriage work at any cost. We find in America that many people have no concept of commitment or their marital vows. We so easily get divorced for any reason and call it "irreconcilable differences." There needs to be more communication on these issues that cause hurt and harm to our relationships. Jesus states in Matthew 19:5,6; (TEV)

> And God said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife and the two will become one. So they are no longer two, but one. No human being must separate, then, what God has joined together."

If I were to ask married couples do they remember their vows, with understanding that was exchanged on that beautiful wedding day, they possible would say no. Just because people have a religious ceremony and attend religious events does not mean they understand and agree with the basic doctrine of God concerning marriage. Let us look at part of the wedding covenant shared between husband and wife.

> "Do you promise to love and cherish her/him, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, for better for worse, and forsaking all others keep thee only unto her/him, so long as you both shall live?"

And, the response 99.9% of the time is "I do." Many say "I do" until you get too sick, or too poor, or the situation gets too bad and as long as you meet my needs. We must communicate in every area of life and commit to making marriage work without divorce being an option. Abusive relationships requires special attention. But, under normal circumstances of marital conflict, there should be limits on the decisions made. For example, no matter how many disagreements my wife and I might have, divorce is never a solution or a topic. Good communication between husband and wife means that they are making an honest attempt to understand each other and resolving their conflicts in a mature fashion. Commitment and communication helps a couple think together, plan together, and grow together in

understanding. Communication also helps build a friendship between married people when it involves good listening. Westerners are suppose to be so advanced but the divorce rate and spousal abuse is outrageous. Family life in Western Africa was a strong system for the communication of moral ideas and cultural values.

(B) Workshop

We open this session with everyone repeating this prayer.

Prayer for Commitment in Marriage

Example: Father, help me to stay committed to working harder at our marriage. Help me not to build love and communication but also friendship. Thank you God for communicating with me and being committed to me and sending your only begotten Son, to die on calvary's cross. Help me to show expressions of love and commitment like you oh Lord. Forgive me Lord for trying to build this marriage my way and not yours. I make a new covenant with you Lord and with my spouse to now try marriage your way. In the name of Jesus I pray.

Session 9
Session on Listening

Answer each of the following questions as always, usually, seldom, or never and be as honest as you can.

How Well Do You Listen?

1. Do you let people finish completely what they are trying to say before you respond?

2. If the other person hesitates, do you try to encourage the person, rather than start your reply?

3. Do you withhold judgment about the worth of the person's idea until it is completely laid out?

4. Can you listen fully even though you think you know what the other person is about to say?

5. Can you listen and think non-judgmentally even if you do not like the person who is talking?

6. Do you stop what you are doing so as to give full attention when listening?

7. Do you give the other person sincere and appropriate eye contact, head nods, and non-verbal signals to indicate you're actively listening and value what they are saying?

8. Do you listen fully regardless of the other's manner of speaking (i.e. grammar, accent, choice of words) or appearance?

9. Do you question (in a positive way) the person to clarify and/or extend ideas more fully?

10. Do you restate/paraphrase what's been said, and ask if you got it right taking responsibility if you didn't?

Beatitudes of A Christian Marriage

BLESSED are the husband and wife who continue to be considerate and affectionate long after the wedding bells have ceased ringing.

BLESSED are those mates who never criticize or speak loudly to one another and who instead quietly discuss their disagreements and work towards solutions.

BLESSED are they who thank God for their food and who set aside some time each day to read the Bible and pray.

BLESSED are they who love their mates more than any other person in the world and who joyfully fulfill their marriage vows in a lifetime of fidelity and mutual helpfulness to one another.

Author Unknown

(C) Handout/Discussion

The Black Value System

1. **COMMITMENT TO GOD**

"The God of our weary years" will give us the strength to give up prayerful passivism and become Black Christian Activists, soldiers for Black freedom and the dignity of all humankind.

2. **COMMITMENT TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY**

The highest level of achievement for any Black person must be a contribution of substance to the strength and continuity of the Black Community.

3. **COMMITMENT TO THE BLACK FAMILY**

The Black family circle must generate strength, stability, and love despite the uncertainty of externals, because these characteristics are required if the developing person is to withstand warping by our racist competitive society.

Those Blacks who are blessed with membership in a strong family unit must reach out and extend that blessing to the unblessed, especially to the children.

4. **DEDICATION TO THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION**

We must forswear anti-intellectualism. Continued survival demands that each Black person be developed to the utmost of his/her mental potential despite the inadequacies of the formal education process. "Real education" fosters understanding of ourselves as well as every aspect of our environment. Also it develops within us the ability to fashion concepts and tools for better utilization of our resources, and more effective solutions to our problems. Since the majority of Blacks have been denied such learning, Black Education must include elements that produce high school graduates with marketable skills, a trade or qualifications for apprenticeships, or proper preparation for college. Basic education for all Blacks should include:

Mathematics, Science, Logic, General Semantics, Participative Politics, Economics and Finance, and the Care and Nurture of Black minds.

5. **DEDICATION TO THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE**

To the extent that we individually reach for, even strain for excellence, we increase, geometrically, the value and resourcefulness of the Black Community. We must recognize the relativity of one's best: this year's best can be bettered next year. Such is the language of growth and development. We must seek to excel in every endeavor.

6. **ADHERENCE TO THE BLACK WORK ETHIC**

"It is becoming harder for Portsmouth to find qualified people to work in the city." Whether this is true or not, it represents one of the many reasons given by businesses and industries for deserting the Portsmouth area. We must realize that a location with good facilities, adequate transportation and a reputation for productive skilled workers will attract industry. We are in competition with other cities, states, and nations for jobs. High productivity must be a goal of the Black Workforce.

7. **COMMITMENT TO SELF-DISCIPLINE AND SELF-RESPECT**

To accomplish anything worthwhile requires self-discipline. We must be a community of self-disciplined persons, if we are to actualize and utilize our own human resources instead of perpetually submitting to exploitation by others. Self-discipline coupled with a respect for self, will enable each of us to be an instrument of Black Progress, and a model for Black Youth.

8. **DISAVOWAL OF THE PURSUIT OF "MIDDLECLASSNESS"**

Classic methodology on control of captives teaches that captors must keep the captives ignorant educationally, but trained sufficiently well to serve the system. Also, the captors must be able to identify the "talented tenth" of those subjugated, especially those who show promise of providing the kind of leadership that might threaten the captor's control.

Those so identified are separated from the rest of the people by:

(1) Killing them off directly, and/or fostering a social system that encourages them to kill off one another.

2) Placing them in concentration camps, and/or structuring an economic environment that induces captive youth to fill the jails and prisons.

(3) Seducing them into a socioeconomic class system which while training them to earn more dollars, hypnotizes them into believing they are better than the rest and teaches them to thin in terms of "we" and "they" instead of "us."

So, while it is permissible to chase "middle-incomeness" with all our might, we must avoid the third separation method: the psychological entrapment of Black "middleclassness." If we avoid this snare, we will also diminish our "voluntary" contributions to methods (1) and (2). And more importantly, Black people no longer will be deprived of their birthright: the leadership, resourcefulness, and example of their own talented persons.

9. **PLEDGE TO MAKE THE FRUITS OF ALL DEVELOPING AND ACQUIRING SKILLS AVAILABLE TO THE BLACK COMMUNITY.**

10. **PLEDGE TO ALLOCATE, REGULARLY, A PORTION OF PERSONAL RESOURCES FOR STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING BLACK INSTITUTIONS.**

11. **PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO ALL BLACK LEADERSHIP WHO ESPOUSE AND EMBRACE THE BLACK VALUE SYSTEM.**

12. **PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO EMBRACEMENT OF THE BLACK VALUE SYSTEM TO MEASURE THE WORTH AND VALIDITY OF ALL ACTIVITY IN TERMS OF POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GENERAL WELFARE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK PEOPLE TOWARDS FREEDOM.**

by Vallmer E. Jordan
Chicago, Illinois

Session 10
Wrapping It Up

1. Reflecting on the sessions. Couples will take turns reflecting and reviewing what each of them have learned.

2. Appointment of one armorbearer to two couples each, for follow-up of progress and as a prayer partner.

3. Connected the participating men to our Men's Ministry and the participating women to the Women's Ministry.

4. Re-enforced daily prayer, study and commitment.

POST-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you now feel that the African American Church can help guide your marriage to success?
   _____yes _____no or _____maybe

2. Do you feel that you can discuss your concerns with a qualified and Christian pastor or counselor.
   _____yes _____no or _____not yet

3. Do you feel that these marital enrichment sessions were helpful to you?
   _____yes _____no

4. Do you feel that Africentric values, customs can enhance your marriage?
   _____yes _____no

5. Do you feel that a better understanding of self can enrich your marriage?
   _____yes _____no _____ not sure

6. Do you think that your marriage can work, considering all the past mistakes?
   _____ yes _____ no or _____ not sure

***Note:** **Each counselee was asked to fill this evaluation questionnaire out.**

The Results

Pre-test Results (40 individuals)

1. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ maybe
2. 20 yes, 11 no or 9 not yet
3. 15 yes, ____ no or 25 maybe
4. 3 yes, ____ no or 37 not sure
5. 32 yes, ____ no or 8 not sure
6. 25 yes, ____ no or 15 not sure

Post-test Results (40 individuals)

1. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ maybe
2. 38 yes, ____ no or _____ not yet
3. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ maybe
4. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure
5. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure
6. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure

This model was successful based on the responses to the six questions asked. There seemed to be a willingness to trust the church and it's spiritual leaders with certain personal information that would help their marriage. Project has proven to be very beneficial to African American marriages and the African American Church.

REFLECTIONS

As the African American Christian Church confronts the hurts and horrors facing African American marriages, it must do so with a victorious attitude. The Church has to be visible and offer a systematic plan to build marriages and homes. The new systematic plan must be interpreted and presented from an Africentric perspective. Africentricity can play and has played a major role in the way ministry is done at Grove Baptist Church. We have been so indoctrinated into the western culture's attitude of marriage which has contributed a large part to the demise of many potentially successful African American marriages.

I was overwhelmed at the positive and receptive response of the officers and members of Grove Church to Africentricity and the Africentric model for marriage. The overall excitement by those directly and indirectly involved in the project was tremendous. This project was and is very much needed if there is to be any positive change among church and family relationships. The amazing factor in this project was that there was no visible or audible sign of rejection but rather a serious sense of hunger and thirst for whole and happier marriages.

This project has shown a larger measure of crippling relationships and the vast amount of work that needs to be done in this area of ministry. Another major factor of this project was that ten weeks was not sufficient enough time to deal with all the major issues confronting African American marriages. This project will take a lifetime to confront and combat the enemies of marital bliss.

I noticed that through the project, persons were so excited about hearing positive principles of Africa tradition and thought that it seem that they thought it was a "end to the means" rather than a "means to an end." Africentricity does not replace Christianity, it only changes the way in wish we interpret and understand it. It allows us to tell our story rather than being the negative part of someone else's story.

I am thoroughly convinced that it takes the initiative of pastors and their armorbearers to be creative and implement what could be an awesome responsibility, but yet a worthwhile and needed one to create change in our marital patterns. I do believe that this project has a significant place in the movement of Christianity interpreted from a Africentric perspective. This has been a worthwhile endeavor and I look forward to bringing together lost pieces of this puzzle.

ENDNOTES

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United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio

Africentric Preaching and Pastoring
February 1994

Mentors: Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu
Dr. Jeremiah Wright

Peer Associate: Reverend Timothy James
Cleveland, Ohio

Contextual Associates:

Reverend L. Lorenzo Akins
Reverend William Lang
Reverend Alexander Bell, Jr.
Dr. John H. Fostor
Dr. James E. King
Mrs. Anna Jones
Mrs. Ester Pierce

THE BLACK CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS WITH BLACK MARRIAGES

by

Melvin O. Marriner

Chesapeake, Virginia

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A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM COMMITTEE

OF

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

Melvin O. Marriner

Portsmouth, Virginia

January, 1994

MENTORS

Dr. Jeremiah Wright, Jr.
and
Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu

Results of Model

Pre-test Results (40 individuals)

1. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ maybe
2. 20 yes, 11 no or 9 not yet
3. 15 yes, ____ no or 25 maybe
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5. 32 yes, ____ no or 8 not sure
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Post-test Results (40 individuals)

1. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ maybe
2. 38 yes, ____ no or 2 not yet
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4. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure
5. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure
6. 40 yes, ____ no or _____ not sure

This model has proven to be successful based on the responses from the control group or counselees from the control group or counselees to six questions ask before and after the marriage enrichment seminar. The results seem to show that persons involved in these sessions wee more willing to trust the church and it's spiritual leaders to help create positive, peaceful and passionate relationships. The results also conclude that Africentric experiences,